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ABSTRACT

Little has been done to analyze the forces that predict whether high-risk students will stay in school or drop out. Current and retrospective data from 27 high-risk youths were studied to shed light on this problem and to suggest ways of improving educational services. The at-risk students were from low socioeconomic backgrounds, were Mexican American, and were language minorities. Results showed that the high-risk youths did not differ significantly on standard school entry-level variables. However, more and regular exposure to learning activities in the home and school, in Spanish as well as English, seemed to be associated with greater educational attainment and achievement. The only noticeable differences in elementary school between eventual dropouts and college-bound students appeared on tests of reading achievement. College-bound students and graduates reported more positive memories of elementary school. Dropping out was not influenced by employment, peer relationships, or school attendance policies. But by the end of eighth grade, eventual dropouts could be distinguished by their lower grades and poorer attendance records. There was no evidence that tracking, i.e., locking students into academic instructional streams, influenced dropping out. The findings suggest three general areas for interventions to improve services: (1) academic tutoring and programming; (2) entry considerations, for both elementary and junior and senior high school; and (3) counseling, school participation, and school structure in general. (JAC)

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DIFFERENTIAL EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AMONG "AT-RISK" YOUTH: A CASE STUDY OF LANGUAGE MINORITY YOUTH OF MEXICAN DESCENT AND LOW SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report documents the first in the series of the NCBR's Language Minority Youth Studies. It is an exploratory case study which examines the factors and dynamic process by which the nation's "most at-risk" youth come to drop out of school, to graduate from high school, or to go on to college. "At-risk" youth share three ascriptive characteristics, as the title of the study implies: They are from low socioeconomic backgrounds, they are Hispanic (in this case, of Mexican descent), and they are language minorities (Steinberg, Blinde & Chan, 1982).

While educators and decisionmakers are faced with pressure to improve educational services to these youth, little or no work has been done to analyze the process and forces which push and pull these youngsters toward staying in or dropping out of school. Through analysis of current, as well as retrospective, data from in-depth interviews with 27 "at-risk" youth, extant records of the youth, and public documents about the case study site, this study attempts to shed light on the problem and to suggest possible ways of improving services.

Findings from the case study are probably best presented chronologically--from the point that "at-risk" youth entered school through to the high school years. This approach allows for an understanding of the educational lifespan factors and processes which apparently are influencing "at-risk" youth toward differing levels of educational attainment. It should be underscored here that the findings are based on a sample size of less than 30; as such, the results are merely suggestive.

Upon entry into school, the "at-risk" youth did not differ markedly on standard school-entry level variables, such as family type, language use, generation and socioeconomic background. However, tracing the students' educational careers from before school entry through high school, greater and regular exposure to learning activities in the home and at school, in Spanish as well as in English, appears to be associated with greater educational attainment and achievement among "at-risk" youth.

Examining early elementary school reading achievement scores, school progress reports and attendance for indications of distinguishing trends, the only noticeable differences between dropouts and college-bounds appear on tests of reading achievement. Analysis suggests that the differentials in third-grade reading scores may be related to regular, consistent, and one-to-one tutoring assistance on reading and homework activities; the eventual college-bound students received the most consistent, regular and one-to-one assistance from parents, before entry into school through early elementary years, both in English and in Spanish. "At-risk" youth who entered school with more familiarity with English or with more exposure to tutoring and reading readiness activities in any language also apparently had fewer initial negative experiences in early elementary school, particularly

negative experiences with teachers; these students tend to be those who became college-bound and graduating students.

Reading test scores for eventual "at-risk" graduates and college-bound students appear to decline against national norms between the third and seventh grades, as is often the case for low-income students. However, between the seventh and eighth grades, the case study's "at-risk" eventual graduates and college-bound students seem to experience a turn from decline in national reading achievement. This occurrence appears to be related to successful participation in bilingual and compensatory categorical programs in the seventh grade. Junior high school grades also markedly distinguish the "at-risk" eventual dropouts and college-bounds, with less sorting power for eventual graduates. However, dropout grade point averages tend to be about a C, which do not suggest a severe academic handicap among "at-risk" eventual dropouts.

Attendance records in the eighth grade, but not the seventh, also distinguish the "at-risk" eventual dropouts and college-bounds. Again, they provide little power in differentiating eventual graduates, who attend school with the same high frequency of attendance (over 90 percent) as eventual college-bounds. In contrast, eventual dropouts averaged 70 percent attendance. Finally, in junior high school, certain "at-risk" youth may feel lost in the size and structure of the school, contributing to a lack of interest in school (few positive or negative recollections about junior high school years), declining attendance rates and declining grades; these students tend to become dropouts.

While factors from the junior high school years suggest that "at-risk" eventual dropouts stand apart from eventual graduates and college-bounds at eighth grade graduation, nothing foretold the sharp disengagement of "at-risk" eventual dropouts from participation in high school curricular and extracurricular activities--beginning in the first quarter of their first year in high school. The target state policy of requiring high school students to pay for books also does not appear to explain the disengagement nor to have a major adverse impact upon "at-risk" youth. Extraordinary efforts on the parts of the local school community appear to cushion any potential negative impact.

The state policy of dropping students with ten consecutive days of unexcused absence from attendance rolls also does not seem to be a major cause of dropping out--at least as the policy is implemented in the target high school; it does, however, appear to abet the process of dropping out. Eventual dropouts did not report peer relationships, on the average, that differ from those of eventual graduates and college-bounds at any point in their educational careers.

Contrary to the popular notion that "at-risk" youth are lured out of school and into full-time employment, especially in economically robust areas like that of the case study, the study's dropouts, while desiring to work, did not profit from the area's relative economic prosperity. Indeed, those "at-risk" youth who were working at all (not in growth industries), part-time during the school-year and full-time during

summers, were students in school. Apparently, dropouts had neither the skills nor the job experience sufficient to enter any occupational openings, let alone those in growth industries. In short, while the data suggest that there is a cumulative tendency for eventual dropouts to become increasingly distinguished from eventual graduates and college-bounds, eventual dropouts' sharp disengagement from schooling at the start of high school was unexpected and not explained by any of the popular notions about dropping out.

Tracking--that is, locking students into academic instructional streams--has sometimes been hypothesized to contribute towards the phenomenon of dropping out; but this case study finds no evidence to support the notion, and, in fact, tracking is not evidenced. By the second year of high school, college-bound students did appear to be taking more academically demanding courses than graduates (dropouts were hardly taking any courses at all), but records indicate that a majority of the college-bounds in junior high school were enrolled in compensatory or remedial courses, showed staggered academic improvement, and were then appropriately placed in more academically demanding courses. Thus, rather than identifying a tracking procedure in this study, it appears that the target school administrators apparently try to match academic instruction to students' changing abilities and efforts. It also is worth noting that the eventual college-bounds tend to receive higher marks than other students, regardless of the instructional difficulty of their courses, beginning in junior high school and with increasing distinction through high school.

The practical implications of these findings seem to suggest three general types of interventions for improved services with differing foci for the critical elementary, junior high and senior high school years:

1. Academic Tutoring and Programming. From before entry into school through high school, the more academically successful "at-risk" youth have had greater exposure to bilingual learning--at least in this study--with "at-risk" college-bound students reporting biliteracy in Spanish and in English. Thus, School districts may wish to examine this apparent phenomenon more comprehensively and to enhance bilingual learning opportunities for "at-risk" youth should the tentative finding be supported.

   Regular and consistent personalized academic assistance from adults, particularly before entry into school and during the early years of elementary school, seems important to early and continuing academic achievement. Programs to help train parents, volunteers and regular school personnel to provide one-to-one regular assistance may prove beneficial in these critical early years of entry.

   In junior high school, there is some evidence that programs for disadvantaged and bilingual youth contribute to the educational progress of some "at-risk" youth. Peer tutoring also may be beneficial to these adolescents. Allowing "at-risk" youth who are

not achieving at grade level to tutor students also may be worth some experimentation, insofar as research tends to show that both tutor and tutee benefit from directed cross-age tutoring.

In high school, evidence suggested that the target high school did not lock "at-risk" youth into college-bound and regular tracks. Instead, students appeared to be placed initially according to previous educational performance and to be moved to lesser or to more demanding courses as classroom performance suggested. The target high school also may wish to consider making its academic curriculum more descriptive of a continuum of learning. That is, through careful inspection of student records, the evidence indicated that apparent tracks were, in fact, better described in terms of a learning continuum. It may be worth the high school's time to rework course description and labels to reflect this continuum, rather than allow the implication of tracking.

2. Entry Considerations. At entry both into elementary school and into high school, adjustment or acclimation seems problematic for some "at-risk" students. At entry into elementary school, "at-risk" students with less exposure to predominantly English settings or with less exposure to language development and reading readiness activities seemed to have more negative experiences than their counterparts--or, at least, to have had more negative memories of elementary school, which were more negative than any other period of schooling. Negative initial encounters within the school may be difficult to undo; as such, schools may wish to review how they orient and welcome children and families to their first days and years in school and to enhance current orientation programs.

At entry into high school, many "at-risk" youth whose academic records were undistinguished, but not necessarily suggestive of academic handicap, disengaged themselves sharply from virtually the entire high school experience. Peer participation programs, which often have included responsibility for welcoming and orienting "new" students to the high school, may be one way to reduce the occurrence of disengagement. Counseling, in the best sense of the word, and peer participation programs may prove useful in engaging students before they drift psychologically and physically away from the school.

3. Counseling, Participation and Structure in General. While counseling and peer participation programs are noted above with respect to entry into high school, the findings of the case study also suggest the need for them at the junior high school level. By the middle of junior high school, disinterest in school is noticed in the eventual dropout. The documentation reviewed in this study suggests that available extracurricular activities do not engage to students, and counseling is rarely sought or given. Peer participation programs at the junior high school level may help certain "at-risk" youth overcome the sense of "not belonging" felt in the changing of classes and teachers. Additionally, school districts may wish, as part of plans regarding changes in

declining enrollment and cost-reduction, to experiment more with middle-schools, which remove the apparent structural concern by continuing the elementary school practice of students' having one teacher for most of the day.

In high school, counseling and participation have already been discussed with respect to entry. There also is some evidence that the kinds of career counseling endeavors being considered and implemented at the target high school are important, since a number of "at-risk" youth, dropouts and graduates, seemed unable to move from wishful speculation about the future to taking action toward real planning. Peer participation programs also can do more than engage potentially disinterested students into the life of the school. One such program in Los Angeles recently was commended by the Mayor for its effects on reducing occurrences of vandalism and in-school behavioral disturbances, and improving students' attendance, school-community relations, school beautification, and student contributions in the form of city-wide presentations of art work and the like. Finally, as a structural and programmatic innovation, school districts and high schools may wish to investigate the possibility of encouraging economically-robust industries to participate in joint vocational training activities, coordinated with career counseling. Successful programs have been launched in several urban school districts, whereby industry representatives tutor and train students in technical and basic skills through adopt-a-school programs. While we found no evidence that "at-risk" students were being lured out of school and into growth industries, we also found no evidence that Mexican-American, low SES, language minority students had skills and access to jobs in the community's growing industries. Adopt-a-school programs help to prepare "at-risk" youth for the world of work, while also demanding that they stay in school to gain requisite skills.

I. INTRODUCTION

Dropping out of school among Mexican-American youth is a severe problem. It is estimated that the dropout rate for this population ranges between 30 to 40 percent (Steinberg, Blinde & Chan, 1982). A number of reasons have been given for the high rate of premature school termination among Mexican-American youth. One contributing factor may be that Spanish continues to be the language of the home for many of these students. As a consequence of the non-English home language, Mexican-American children may experience school-related difficulties that depress their academic achievement in the early school years and from which they cannot recover to close the gap between themselves and majority group students in the later school years. Some researchers have even suggested that the schooling gap widens with further schooling and that this is the reason why many Mexican-American youth terminate their schooling prior to high school graduation.

A second factor sometimes pointed to as contributing to the dropout problem rests on institutional forces which impede the educational progress of Mexican-American students (Steinberg et al., 1982). Specifically, Mexican-American students may experience more negative interactions with their majority group teachers than do other students. Related to this is the fact that often there is a mismatch between the language of the child and that of the school program and environment. This mismatch may be such that the child is made to feel unwelcomed and peripheral to the schooling process, resulting in poorer performance in academic skills such as reading, lower scores on school achievement tests, and poorer grades.

A third identified factor relates to the culture of the Mexican-American child and the value it places on educational attainment. At one time it was popular to assert that the poorer school performance of Mexican-American students was due in large measure to their cultural background, which did not reinforce academic attainment and success (Carter & Segura, 1979). Today we recognize that this culturally-based interpretation is inaccurate for a variety

of reasons. More often than not educators who pointed to the lower educational attainment of Mexican-Americans had knowingly or unknowingly confounded culture with social class, educational level of parents, and parents' knowledge of English. Until culture and socioeconomic status cease to be confounded in research, no explanations based on cultural premises can be offered.

Regardless of the factors leading to school attrition among Mexican-American youth, the consequences are severe. In short, dropouts face a grim future of higher unemployment rates and lower earnings, require more public assistance, and are more likely to be involved in crime than their more educated counterparts (Levin, 1972; King, 1978; Carnegie Council, 1979). In other words, the costs of premature school exit are great both to the individual and to society.

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to examine potential causes of dropping out of school among a group of Mexican-American youth. The target group was compared to matched groups who did not drop out of school (graduates) and who intended to continue on to higher education (college bound). The guiding belief of the study was that no single factor contributes to early school termination nor can a critical turning point be identified which makes a difference in the life of an individual youngster. Rather, it was held that the phenomenon of dropping out is best understood as a dynamic and complex process, involving the influences of the school, the family, peers, and economic factors, all of which interact with the person over time.

This case study focuses attention on Mexican-American youth "most-at-risk" to drop out of school. "At-risk" youth share three ascriptive characteristics: They are from low socioeconomic backgrounds (low SES), they are Mexican-American, and they all have Spanish language home backgrounds. The intent of the study was to provide a greater understanding of the factors and of the dynamic process by which "at-risk" youth come to drop out of school, to graduate from high school, or to go on to college. While educators and

decisionmakers are pressured to improve educational services to these youth, little or no work has been done to analyze the process and forces which push and pull these youngsters towards staying in or dropping out of school.

Through analysis of current, as well as retrospective, data from in-depth interviews with 27 "at-risk" youth, extant school records of the youth, and public documents about the case study site, this examination makes a first attempt to shed light on the problem and to suggest possible ways to improve services to "at-risk" youth.

II. DESIGN ISSUES

While it is easy to state that the youth most "at-risk" to drop out of school are from low socioeconomic, Hispanic and language minority backgrounds, and that this study explores the process and factors by which "at-risk" youth become either dropouts, high school graduates, or college-bound students, there are a variety of ways in which the work can be designed and defined.

Several factors informed and directed the design of this study. First, other work of the NCBR based on the Survey of Income and Education (1976), a nationally representative data set, is exploring survey characteristics of Hispanic language minorities and dropping out (Hirano-Nakanishi & Ballesteros, forthcoming). Second, review of survey instruments, extant school records for students, and public documents revealed that many popular notions and hypotheses about "at-risk" youth and educational attainment could not be explored without additional data collection. Third, the NCBR and the National Institute of Education (NIE) collaboratively agreed that a set of three one-site, short-term case studies on language minority youth and education would constitute a major portion of the NCBR's work in the bilingual education area for the 1982 fiscal year. And fourth, budget limitations restricted the depth and breadth of data collection activities.

Thus, to complement ongoing work on Hispanic language minorities and dropping out, to explore popular hypotheses about "at-risk" youth and educational attainment, and to produce one of three one-site, short-term case studies within budget constraints, the following approach was taken. It was decided to collect and analyze a great deal of information about and from a relatively small number of youth who could be categorized as "at-risk" upon entry into school and who currently are dropouts, on-the-verge of high school graduation, or on-the-verge of high school graduation and college attendance. Three sections describe our approach. They are: Selection of the Site;

Selection of "At-Risk" Youth; and Instruments, Data Collection and Analysis.

Selection of the Site

In limited one-site case studies, it is impossible to directly test notions and hypotheses about differential environments within which a phenomenon occurs. Such is the case in this work. For example, we cannot examine directly the prevalent notion that in economically-robust areas, dropout rates will be higher because students will be pulled out of school into the alluring full-time job market (see, e.g., Rumberger, 1981). Neither can we explore differences in state, local educational agency, and school-level demographics, policies, programs and resources for the extent to which they affect "at-risk" youth and educational attainment and achievement.

However, given the selection of a site, one can carefully describe the environment, postulate expectations with respect to norms, and indirectly shed light on environmental influences. In this case study, state, city, school district and high school selection characteristics were chosen deliberately to shed light, albeit indirectly, on environmental influences.

The state. The state in which our target high school is located is one in which educational policies may dissuade youth from completing school. First, beginning in the ninth grade, students must purchase their own books, which creates a particular hardship for the low-income family, especially if there is more than one youngster attending high school (ninth through twelfth grades). Second, if a student has ten consecutive days of unexcused school absences, the student must be dropped from active enrollment. What is effectively a fiscal policy, potentially has ramifications beyond the simple regulating of state ADA (average daily attendance) monies, since this ten-day drop policy may well contribute to the process of dropping out. Finally, the state's compulsory attendance laws allow youth to withdraw legally from school at the age of sixteen or the end of 8th grade, whichever comes first. The common cutoff in most of the nation's states is the age of sixteen.

Persons knowledgeable about youth and schooling in the city in which our target school is located have suggested that a great many youth and "at-risk" youth never even make it to ninth grade because the youth have met the state's minimum compulsory attendance standard.

The city. The target high school is located in a city in which higher than national average dropout rates are postulated to occur. Promotional materials on the city indicate that the area has entered an era of unprecedented growth. Between 1970 and 1981, the city population grew by over 51 percent to over half a million people. With an estimated 2,500 new residents arriving each month, state officials predict that the area will be home to well over one million people shortly after the turn of the century. Large metropolitan centers are postulated to be milieux for dropping out (Camp, 1980; Dentler & Warshauer, 1968).

In general, the economy seems to have grown as dynamically as the population. The city's climate, state business and labor laws, and location have continued to attract more and more business to the area, particularly, as of late, the electronics industry. As such, the unemployment rate for the area, about 6 percent, has been well below the national average. Researchers have suggested that economically-robust areas with low unemployment rates may pull high school students into the full-time labor market and out of school, thus contributing to higher dropout rates for the area (Rumberger, 1981; Camp, 1980; Carnegie Council, 1979).

The school district. Like the state and city, the target school district may be characterized as one in which a greater likelihood of students dropping out may occur. However, the school district also is fundamentally concerned with educating its students, with particular interest and demonstrated effort in serving its "at-risk" students. It is important to underscore here that in every way, the school district and its personnel have been encouraging, cooperative and straightforward with the staff at the NCBR, anxious to share their

perceptions and sincerely hopeful that this study can help to shed some light on ways to improve services to "at-risk" students.

Not unlike many big city school districts across the country, the selected school district is faced with a declining student enrollment (10 percent in the last five years) along with concomitant reductions in its labor force and its financial base of support. The district also has been faced with addressing the racial and ethnic segregation of its 40 percent minority, 60 percent Anglo student population, and with cutbacks in categorical program availabilities. Additionally, in the spring of 1981, the district identified close to 12,000 students from 55 different non-English language backgrounds--the vast majority from Spanish language backgrounds. Of these, 1,000 require special services because of their limited-English proficiency.

Under such circumstances, one normally expects districts to reduce their services to minority, language minority and other "special" students, through teacher and program reductions in special service areas, spending less time, effort and money on issues like dropping out and language minority education, focusing instead on desegregation, labor and management issues. However, available information suggests that the district has managed to maintain, and even to enhance, its efforts for "special" students through creative reorganizational, management and other approaches. This does not mean that the district is not under severe pressures and that all is rosy. Indeed, labor force and program reductions are being made. However, they do not appear to be occurring disproportionately in services to "at-risk" students.

Interestingly, the school district appears to be doing more for "at-risk" students now than it did in earlier, more halcyon days. When the "at-risk" youth in this study were in elementary school, available information suggests that bilingual teachers, administrators and support staff were not even concepts; bilingual programs were unavailable; disciplinary policies were more punitive; and other special service programs were much less available. By the time the

study cohort reached junior high school, a limited bilingual education program was available at one of the feeder schools. However, by high school, programs were available to meet special student needs of many sorts. Of particular relevance to the "at-risk" youth in this study, five potentially important intervention programs were available: (1) A high school program which allows students to work during the day and to attend schools on extended schedules; (2) a program for home- or hospital-bound students who could not attend school; (3) junior and senior high school programs for students identified as literally "on-the-verge-of-dropping-out"; (4) a teenage parent program; and (5) a high school bilingual education program.

The history of changes in district policies and programs would be a fascinating study in itself, apparently linked to federal regulatory policies, community prodding, changes in school board members, changes in administration and the like. For the purposes here, the above brief scenario simply suggests that records and recollections of "at-risk" youth may well indicate more difficulties with schooling in the early years of schooling than in later years.

The school. Like the selection of school district, the school was selected for two fundamental reasons: First, it could be typified as a school in which dropping out may be a more prevalent phenomenon than in others; and second, it could be typified as a school that is fundamentally concerned with improving its services to students.

The segregated nature of schools in the district made it relatively easy to identify "at-risk" high schools in which the student population is predominantly Hispanic, from low SES backgrounds, and significantly of non-English language backgrounds--that is, high schools in which dropping out may be a prevalent phenomenon. In the selected school, of the 1,655 target high school students enrolled in 1981-82, only 12.5 percent of the student population was Anglo, while 76 percent was Hispanic. The high school is a Title I (Chapter 1) school, a designation based on poverty and test score disadvantage. Between 30 and 50 percent of the student body comes from households

with an annual income of less than $10,000. A little over 1,000 students (68.5 percent) in the school have been identified as coming from homes with a non-English language background (NELB), where the other-spoken language is predominantly Spanish.

The high school has a student enrollment larger than the national average of 1,300--suggesting greater administrative and management complexities than an average-size high school.

Also, the high school consistently has had the highest overall dropout rate in the district. In 1978-79, the annual dropout rate for the school was 14 percent, as compared to the district's 8.7 percent. In 1979-80, the rate was 10.4 percent, compared with the district's rate of 8.4 percent, and in 1980-81, the school's rate was 11.6 percent, while the district's was only 8 percent.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that the above figures represent year-by-year calculations. Dropout figures for the cohort of students entering the 9th grade in 1978 show that over the 4-year period, between 1978 and 1982, 15.5 percent of the students could clearly be called dropouts. For Hispanic students, the cumulative dropout rate was 18.3 percent. It should be added that these proportions do not include students who, as entering 9th graders in 1978, went on to graduate in three years, transferred to another school, were retained, or are not currently attending but are still considered "active."

The last point bears some explanation. Review of school records indicated that a significant number of students enroll, drop out or are dropped out (vis-a-vis the 10-day unexcused absence rule), and re-enroll in school in a kind of "revolving door" fashion. In one sense, they are retainees (and have been counted as such in this section) when they are in school, since they are not making year-to-year progress toward high school graduation in 4 years. On the other hand, they are dropouts when they are not in school, for periods ranging from one quarter to one semester. School personnel stated that

they do not remove dropouts from the active file until the year's end, because most current dropouts do return within the school year. Some, however, do not. As such, the cumulative dropout rate calculated here may underestimate the final four-year dropout rates overall and for Hispanics in the 1978 high school entry cohort. In sum, from all of these factors, the high school can easily be typified as an "at-risk" school environment.

There is, however, evidence that the school personnel are committed to improving services to their students. The school has apparently offered a full range of academic and extracurricular offerings, at least since 1978, including Title I courses, bilingual courses, gifted courses, advanced placement courses, a full array of vocational and commercial courses (including data processing), special language labs, 21 different extracurricular clubs, ten offerings in interscholastic sports with five areas of interscholastic competition, and a variety of district outside-the-high-school alternatives for gifted as well as other special need students.

Over the last three years, the average language achievement score for students in the school has risen from the 18th percentile to the 31st, perhaps reflecting qualitative changes in educational experiences offered to students. Staff have been involved in ongoing inservice activities geared at reworking the curriculum to connect subject content with real-world orientations. In an effort to address the dropout problem and improve overall academic performance, the school has recently replaced its "advisor" system, at least conceptually, with a comprehensive counseling program which focuses on personal and school adjustment, as well as career planning. Special outreach efforts are made, especially with new incoming students, and some peer tutoring and counseling components have been implemented to help capitalize on support systems and problem-solving strategies that can result from student-to-student interactions. Further, a voluntary in-house suspension program, emphasizing personal counseling and academic tutoring, has been established as an alternative to more traditional disciplinary techniques.

Again, nothing written above should be construed to suggest that all is rosy. Rather, it is fairer to say that the school is struggling to improve in the face of many difficulties, beyond the special needs that the student body brings to the school. Budget cutbacks have caused the closure of certain special labs for students, the loss of a career counseling assistant, and so on. There is pressure and strain within the school, but there also is a steady commitment and effort on the part of school personnel to make the school a successful environment for its students.

Summary. The above description on embedded target site units should suggest that selection characteristics were deliberately chosen to give the study a contextual environment within which "at-risk" youth (i.e., Mexican-American, low-SES, language minority youth) are especially "at-risk," but also one in which the school district and school have demonstrated commitment to improving services for these youth.

Selection of "At-Risk" Youth

Earlier in this chapter, it was stated that the study would focus attention on youth who could be categorized as "at-risk" upon entry into school and who currently are dropouts, on-the-verge of high school graduation or on-the-verge of high school graduation and college attendance. In this section, the operationalization of selection criteria and the procedures for selection are discussed.

Selection criteria. "At-risk" youth have been defined as Hispanic, from low socioeconomic status, and from language minority households upon entry into school. A two-stage selection screening basically ensured that all youth in the study could be defined as "at-risk" at entry.

At the first stage, from available student record files, it was possible to identify students who were classified as Hispanic.

Additionally, registration forms allowed the identification of the occupation of the parent(s). Using the scale developed by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (1978), a screen for low socioeconomic status (SES) was created, based on educational attainment requirements of jobs and occupational status of jobs--two important factors in most measures of SES. As such, it was possible to identify students who could be classified as having come from low SES households upon entry into school. The most common definition of language minority background is that a non-English language was at least one of the languages spoken in the home in childhood. From the same registration forms, it was possible to identify students whose parents indicated that Spanish was spoken at home.

Thus, from available school records, it was possible to identify youth who were "at-risk" upon entry into school. It should be added that, nationally, most "at-risk" youth are U.S.-born or have had all of their primary and secondary education in the United States (Lopez, 1982). As such, it did not seem unreasonable to screen out "at-risk" youth who did not receive all of their schooling in the United States. In this study, then, the extremely complex issues involving age of entry into U.S. schools, years in foreign school, years in U.S. schools, and so on, are not addressed. While clearly important issues to investigate, it was felt that a limited case study could not begin to address both the predominant trend among "at-risk" youth, as well as this important secondary trend.

At the second stage of screening, after preliminary selection procedures were followed, potential interviewees were asked whether they would describe themselves as Mexican-American, Mexican or Chicano, whether Spanish was spoken at home before they entered school, whether their parents had completed any kind of college education, and their parents' current occupations. Information on language and ethnicity were verified for all potential "interviewees." Excluded from the study at this point were youth who at entry were "at-risk," but who now would not be, on the basis of a higher family socioeconomic status. Only two potential interviewees were excluded at this stage. This was

done so the limited case study did not have to consider changing SES in relation to student educational attainment. Again, while this may be an important consideration, a limited case study with 27 interviews could not begin to address this dynamic.

Dropouts were identified by the school procedure which placed their records in an inactive file. College-bound high school seniors were identified from active records as those who had taken either the SAT or the ACT, two college placement tests, and/or who had had their transcripts sent to at least one college (two- or four-year) or university. High school graduates were current high school seniors, all of whose active records recently had been reviewed as meeting high school graduation requirements. It should be added that the dropout, graduate and college-bound "at-risk" youth were to be selected from the same cohort. That is, all were to be members of the 1978 entering class of ninth graders at the target high school. This was true for 26 of the 27 interviewed "at-risk" youth. One "at-risk" youth, however, slipped through the selection screens. This student was in the 1979 entering class, is graduating from high school in three years, and is college-bound.

Selection procedures. Using student record files, students found on the March, 1982, list of graduating seniors were sorted into graduates and college-bounds according to the above criteria, as well as sorted by race/ethnicity

The 1978 class list of entering ninth graders was then compared with the March, 1982 list of graduating seniors. The procedure identified 74 seniors who were not members of the 1978 entering class, of which 54 were Hispanic. To the extent that any of the 54 Hispanic seniors were "at-risk" upon entry as well as meeting the other selection characteristics, they were included in the total pool of "at-risk" youth, since most were transfers from within the school district or "at-risk" youth who were held back in high school from graduating with their normal cohort. The procedure also identified 288 youth who were not graduating in 1982, of which 207 were Hispanic.

Using the school's inactive files, these 288 youth were sorted into three groups: Dropouts, transfers to other schools, and no-shows (students whose names had been submitted to the target high school from feeder schools, who never enrolled, and whose school cumulative records were never requested by other high schools or school districts). These youth records also were sorted by race/ethnicity.

Seventy-four youth from the 1978 ninth grade cohort still remained unclassified. According to school personnel, these youth were students held back from graduating in 1982 because they were lacking requisite credits and required courses. Sufficient information was available on the 1978 ninth grade class list to sort these students by race/ethnicity.

Table II-1 shows the results of the above-described sorting. The table reveals interesting within-school variations for this predominantly minority and Hispanic school. The differential educational attainments of Anglos, Hispanics and Blacks seem apparent. (It is difficult to conclude much regarding American Indian and Asian students, since their numbers are so small.) The table also suggests that it would have been interesting to include Hispanic "at-risk" retained students in the case study, since they lie, as a group, between graduating seniors and dropouts in terms of educational attainment. However, the study's instruments were already developed and tested at the time of sorting. Finally, Hispanic students are "no-shows" far less frequently than other students. When shown these results, school personnel suggested that "no-show" does not necessarily mean "dropped out before entering high school." They believed that a number of "no-shows" would have requested their junior high schools to forward records on to attending high schools.

TABLE II-1. CENSUS, ETHNICITY BY GROUP--
FREQUENCIES AND PERCENTAGES BY ETHNICITY

ETHNICITY	COLLEGE BOUND	GRADUATE	RETAINEE	DROPOUT	TRANSFER	NO-SHOW	TOTAL
Hispanic	45 10.4%	180 41.7%	57 13.2%	79 18.3%	45 10.4%	26 6%	432 100%
Anglo	13 20.9%	16 25.8%	6 9.7%	1 1.6%	12 19.4%	14 22.6%	62 100%
Black	7 10.8%	21 32.3%	7 10.8%	8 12.3%	8 12.3%	14 21.5%	65 100%
American Indian	2 11.1%	8 44.4%	4 22.2%	1 11.1%	1 11.1%	2 22.2%	18 100%
Asian	0	0	0	1 33.3%	1 33.3%	1 33.3%	3 100%
TOTAL	67 11.6%	225 38.8%	74 12.8%	90 15.5%	67 11.6%	57 9.8%	580 100%

Following the census identification, the complete record files of the Hispanic college-bound, graduate and dropout youth were screened on the "at-risk" selection criteria. Two college-bound Hispanic youth were eliminated because Spanish was never spoken in the household, and several (less than ten) Hispanic youth were excluded across groups because the occupation of the parent(s) was above the cutoff point. Several (less than ten) Hispanic youth were excluded because not all of their schooling was in the United States. Finally, a number of youth (roughly 50) were excluded from the pool because their record files were incomplete. Most of these exclusions were dropouts and graduates, missing many school progress and testing reports.

All graduating college-bound Hispanic students meeting the "at-risk" criteria were then assigned numbers and ordered using a table of random numbers. The process was repeated for the graduate and dropout pools of Hispanic "at-risk" youth. Three separate, ordered lists of names of "at-risk" college-bound, graduate and dropout youth were developed.

The site field coordinator sequentially screened "at-risk" college-bounds, graduates and dropouts at the second stage selection using the ordered lists. The second stage screening was done with the cooperation of school staff, who allowed the field coordinator to meet

individually with college-bounds and graduates for approximately 15 minutes during school time. In addition to asking the second-stage selection questions, the field coordinator explained the study to the youth and ascertained student interest in participating in the study. All the college-bounds and graduates expressed interest; they each were given printed information on the study for themselves and their parents, along with a set of consent forms which would allow the NCBR to review school records and to interview the youth if permission were granted. Tentative dates for the youth interview were set at this meeting, although interviews were not conducted until the set of consent forms was completed and returned to the field coordinator.

Screening and meeting with dropouts proved to be very difficult. After securing the last available address and telephone on record for dropouts, the field coordinator attempted to make contact with the dropouts by telephone. Twenty-five youth from the eligible dropout pool were never reached by telephone. The families of these youth had either disconnected telephone numbers, unpublished telephone numbers, or failed to answer after repeated calls. The families of four other youth were contacted, but the youth had moved out of town and, according to the family, could not be reached. In the end, the field coordinator made contact with 11 dropouts, three of whom were uninterested in participating in the study and one of whom failed to keep interview dates. The seven other youth were screened on selection criteria; consent was received, and interviews took place.

In sum, an exhaustive selection process was carried out to ensure that all 27 youth interviewed in this study were indeed "at-risk" children upon entry into school. Each of the 27 youth were interested and willing to be subjects in the study, and each of their legal guardians consented to their participation.

Despite following the above procedures, a few youth slipped through the screening process. As already mentioned, one college-bound "at-risk" youth turned out to be a three-year high school graduate. Furthermore, the same youth stated that she had her early years of

schooling in Mexico, with her U.S. schooling experience starting in late elementary school. Another college-bound began his educational career in Mexico, arriving in the target school district at the mid-elementary school level. These cases are discussed in Chapter V.

Instruments, Data Collection and Analysis

Earlier it was stated that a decision was made to collect and analyze a great deal of information about and from "at-risk" youth. Essentially, there were four sources of data:

- Interviews with those knowledgeable about Hispanics, language minorities, education, and dropping out at the site;
- Basic documents on the state, city, school district and school;
- Interviews with "at-risk" youth; and
- School records of "at-risk" youth.

Knowledgeables' Interviews. A series of interviews with a cross-section of individuals that included selected school district administrators, school board members, district administrators of dropout-related and language-related programs and services, community-based program and service administrators, industry-based program and service administrators, community leaders, and local researchers were conducted at the outset of the case study. Altogether 25 interviews were conducted with 20 males and 5 females, of which 19 were Hispanic and 6 were Anglos.

The interview, composed of 21 broad multiple-level inquiries, ran for approximately an hour and a half, eliciting from these "knowledgeables":

1. Their perception of the dropout problem in their community;
2. Their opinions on factors related to the elevated dropout rates among language minority students;
3. Their perspectives on current programs, policies, and services which impact positively or negatively on the dropout problem among language minorities;

4. Their identification of potential resources currently untapped within the school and community which might be drawn upon to address the language minority dropout problem; and

5. Their recommendations for program and service innovations and educational policy changes which would positively influence the progress of language minority students through the schools in their community.

Three interviewers were trained to use the interview schedule. The one-day training covered a range of topics, including identifying potential interviewees, approaching and setting up appointments with interviewees, interviewing etiquette, using the interview schedule, and following-up the interviews.

The knowledgeables' interviews were carefully reviewed for hypotheses about "at-risk" youth and dropping out, and notions were used in developing the "at-risk" interview schedules. To the extent that knowledgeables' perceptions of the "at-risk" dropout problem corresponded with analyses, their perspectives and recommendations for intervention are used in discussion of the analyses. Additionally, knowledgeables were asked for documentation or leads to documentation regarding their more structural and programmatic contributions; these recommendations and documents are used throughout the study as appropriate.

Basic documents. Fundamental to any case study is the development of a knowledge base about the context within which the particular issues under consideration occur. In this case, interest centered on the context within which "at-risk" youth drop out of school, graduate from high school, or go on to college. In general terms, then, it was vital to learn about and to document as much as possible the culture of the larger community and the nature of the school system that surround the "at-risk" youth.

To this end, field coordinators collected hard-copy data in the following areas:

- City demographics and economy
- Local government and politics
- Community demographics and economy of high school attendance area
- Demographics on youth and language minority youth
- Financial status of the school district
- Decisionmaking structure of the school district
- Racial/ethnic surveys of students and school personnel
- Language surveys of students
- Teacher and staff labor and certification issues
- School district policies, programs, and services related to dropping out and language minority youth
- Grading and testing policies
- Dropout statistics

Basic documents were used analytically and to substantiate selection of site units.

'nterviews and school records for "at-risk" youth. Youth interv[illegible] and school records are primary sources of information about the process by which "at-risk" youth drop out, graduate, and go on to college.

Knowledgeables' interviews and the NCBR's literature review (Steinberg, Blinde & Chan, 1982) strongly suggested that extant documents and records would be insufficient for examining popular hypotheses about the process and factors affecting "at-risk" youth. Staff carefully reviewed existing youth interview schedules and survey questionnaires, particularly those focusing on dropping out and/or language minorities, for instruction on interview schedule

construction. General topical areas tapped in the final field-tested youth interview schedule included:

- Individual demographic and language characteristics now and retrospectively
- Family background and language characteristics now and retrospectively
- Perceptions of school, teachers, programs, counseling, and other services from elementary school through high school
- Family, community, and school support networks now and retrospectively
- Future orientations
- Perceptions of family, school, and community aspirations for them
- Influences on educational and other decisions about school

In an effort to keep the interviews within one hour, several dozen questions were excluded from the interview schedule. Deletions were based on field-testing results and on lack of relationship to hypotheses about the process of differential educational attainment among "at-risk" youth, particularly lack of relationship to knowledgeables' hypotheses. Interviews were conducted in May and June, 1982, by the field coordinator.

Individual student cumulative records form a historical record of an individual's progress through school. Researchers examining cumulative records have found that a number of important variables contained in them help to distinguish dropouts from high school graduates and from college-bound graduates. In particular, cumulative grades, subject grades, attendance records, truancy and suspension records, ability and achievement test score data and behavioral reports have been used in prediction studies regarding dropping out. The intention in this case study was to profile each student's entire educational progress from entry to exit in order to ascertain trends and critical turning points in educational progress among "at-risk" dropouts, graduates and college-bounds.

Testing information, grading data, and absences from the seventh grade through high school are kept with remarkable consistency and comparability in the school district and in the high school. However, elementary school grades and other reports were less conducive to systematic analysis. When the study cohort was in elementary school, schools were given discretion on how to report student progress. Forms were not identical, although all youth who attended the district's elementary schools did have comparable first through third grade marks on one variable which apparently rated the student's general academic, personal and social progress in one of four ways: Very good progress, satisfactory progress, unsatisfactory progress, and improvements shown. In grades four through six, the only comparable measure found for students were behavioral marks regarding effort and cooperation, indicated in one of three ways: Excellent, satisfactory or needs improvement. Additionally, records for these early years were sometimes missing, although no youth was missing all of the first through third grade records nor all of the fourth through sixth grade records. As such, for elementary school, NCBR central staff decided that one primary school mark would be recorded reflecting the student's early academic, personal and social progress in school, and one intermediate school mark would be recorded reflecting only the student's effort and cooperation in the fourth through sixth grades.

As noted above, testing information was remarkably complete and detailed. Table II-2 lists the various standardized tests that were administered to our sample cohort as they progressed through school. Asterisks indicate the tests that all youth took. As best as can be determined, the non-asterisked tests appear to be related to district participation in categorically-financed programs. To ease the prose in subsequent chapters, the cohort-comparable tests will not be identified by name. Rather, they will be referred to as: Third grade reading achievement; fifth grade reading achievement; seventh grade reading achievement; ninth grade achievement; eighth grade writing achievement; eighth grade language arts achievement; tenth grade language arts achievement; eighth grade mathematics achievement; fifth grade general

TABLE II-2. TESTING INFORMATION

TEST NAME	GRADE	Month Administered	SCORES REPORTED Raw	Staning	Percentile
READING ACHIEVEMENT					
*Metropolitan 1970 Primary II Form H	3rd	January	X	X	
Metropolitan 1970 Elementary Form F	4th	October/May	X	X	X
*Metropolitan 1970 Intermediate Form F	5th	October	X	X	X
Nelson 1964 Form B	7th	September/April	X	X	X
*Metropolitan 1970 Advanced Form F	7th	September	X	X	X
CTBS 1973 Level 2	8th	September/April	X	X	X
*CTBS 1973 Level 3	9th	September	X	X	X
CAT 1977 Level 18	9th	October	X	X	X
CTBS 1973 Level 3	10th	October	X	X	X
WRITING ACHIEVEMENT					
*Step II 1971 Form 3A	8th	November	X	X	X
ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS					
*Step II 1971 Form 3A	8th	November	X	X	X
*CAT 1977 Language Arts Form 19C	10th	October	X	X	X
MATHEMATICS ACHIEVEMENT					
*Stanford 1973 Advanced Form A	8th	October	X	X	X
GENERAL VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL					
*Lorge Thorndike 1964 Multi Form C-1	5th	December	X	X	
MISCELLANEOUS OTHER TESTS					
InterAmerica 1962 Elementary Lectura Form 3-CE	7th/8th	October/April	X		
InterAmerica 1962 Elementary Reading Form 3-CE	7th/8th	October/April	X		
TPS Self-Concepts Inventory	7th/8th	February or April	X		
*DOS AMIGOS English and Spanish Language Proficiency	6th	September	X		

*Scores reported for entire cohort.

non-verbal aptitude; fifth grade general verbal aptitude; and sixth grade relative language proficiency, respectively. Table II-2 also reveals that none of the study's cohort was tested district-wide prior to the third grade. In this case study, we had hoped to examine the hypothesis that "at-rist" dropouts are differentiated "at-risk" stay-ins on the basis of aptitude upon entry into school. Lack of early aptitude data on the cohort made examination of this notion infeasible.

In June, 1982, the NCBR central staff developed an elaborate coding scheme for youth interviews and student cumulative records, identifying several hundred variables from both sources. Coding was completed by the first week in July, and data were placed on disk by the second week. Data were cleaned in two ways: Frequency checks and checks between coding sheets and computer data dumps. Since well over 700 variables were coded for the 27 subjects, the first-stage analysis employed crosstabular, breakdown, and Pearson correlational procedures to identify subsets of variables upon which dropouts, graduates, and college-bounds differed. Subsets were then grouped along time sequences: Pre-school-entry variables (largely family background variables), elementary-school-level variables, junior-high-school-level variables, and high-school-level variables. Owing to the small sample size, further analytic techniques were likewise restricted. While lagged-variable-structural models probably are most appropriate, the approach could not be employed. Instead, some simple, but prevalent, hypotheses about dropouts, graduates and college-bound were examined; results are discussed in Chapter III. Factors associated with critical turning points among dropouts, graduates and college-bounds were examined; results are discussed in Chapter IV. Finally, outlier analyses were performed to ascertain potentially promising or manipulable factors that can impinge on "at-risk" students during their educational careers; results are discussed in Chapter V.

III. COMPLEXITIES IN SIMPLE NOTIONS

In this chapter, we examine several simple hypotheses or notions about why "at-risk" youth drop out, graduate or go to college. The examination reveals that simplicity's antonym best describes the findings. Complexity in simple notions abounds.

Notion 1: About Language

> "At-risk" youth from monolingual Spanish households who entered school speaking only Spanish will drop out more than their other language-minority counterparts.

"At-risk" youth in this study are all Mexican-American or Mexican, of low socioeconomic status, and from households in which Spanish was at least one of the languages spoken at home before the youth entered school. Under the above hypothesis, it is suggested that discrimination among "at-risk" dropouts, graduates and college-bounds can be made if individual and household language characteristics of finer detail than the control variable are allowed to screen the youth.

If this hypothesis proves true, a major portion of the process of dropping out and staying in school for "at-risk" youth is clarified. Language would drive the process of differential educational attainment for "at-risk" youth, and promising interventions to encourage higher educational attainment probably would flow from examining the relative effectiveness of language-related programs for Spanish-speaking "at-risk" children and youth.

Findings from this study on the above hypothesis are not simple nor straightforward. A majority of dropouts, indeed, did come from households in which only Spanish was spoken (57%), whereas 70 percent of the graduates came from bilingual households. However, 70 percent of the college-bounds, like the dropouts, came from monolingual Spanish households, clearly presenting an unusual pattern of household language use by educational attainment groupings, which is not generally interpretable.

Likewise, a majority of dropouts reported that they only spoke Spanish before entry into school (57%), whereas 70 percent of the graduates said that they entered school speaking both Spanish and English. Somewhat surprisingly, 80 percent of the college-bounds reported that they only spoke Spanish when they entered school. In short, the available evidence fails to either lend or withhold support for the hypothesis. One simple alternative hypothesis andone two-variate hypothesis were examined. The simple notion was whether generational differences among the "at-risk" Mexican-American and Mexican youth explained the observed differences in educational attainment. All of the "at-risk" dropouts and 90 and 80 percent of the graduates and college-bounds, respectively, were not foreign-born. This suggests, at least in this study that neither the hypothesis of greater acculturation to the U.S. (each sequential generation is more acculturated and, thus, will achieve higher educational attainment levels) nor the hypothesis of greater motivation to succeed (foreign-borns "try harder" and achieve higher educational attainment levels) are supported. The two-variate hypothesis was whether generation and individual language use prior to school-entry differentiated among dropouts, graduates, and college-bounds. An interpretable pattern does not appear to prevail.

Finally, the possibility was explored that individual or household language shifts from use of "Spanish only" to use of "both Spanish and English" or use of "English only" might differentiate among the educational attainment groupings. Underlying these notions are several explanatory postulates and combinations of postulates. For example, some might suggest that as Spanish-speaking household members learn and use English, children directly or indirectly are also supported and encouraged to learn English, thus engaging the children in both the learning process and English language acquisition. It might be added or stated separately that families which actively or passively value bilingualism through family language use encourage bilingualism in their children, which supports educational achievement. Or, it is sometimes postulated that the more that English is spoken around the

home, the more children will speak and learn English, and the more they will learn and achieve in school.

Tables III-1 and III-2 display current household languages and current individual languages by educational attainment groupings. When compared with household and individual language patterns at entry into school, they lend some support to the notion about language shift. All of the Spanish-only households of college-bounds upon entry to school have shifted to current bilinguality, with lesser degrees of shifting among the dropout and graduate households.

TABLE III-1. CURRENT HOME LANGUAGES BY GROUP--
PERCENTAGES AND GROUP/TOTAL N

HOME LANGUAGE	DROPOUT	GRADUATE	GRADUATE+
Spanish Only	29%	20%	0%
Spanish and English	71%	80%	100%
N = 27	7	10	10

TABLE III-2. CURRENT INDIVIDUAL LANGUAGES BY GROUP--
PERCENTAGES AND GROUP/TOTAL N

INDIVIDUAL LANGUAGES	DROPOUT	GRADUATE	GRADUATE+
Spanish Only	0%	0%	0%
Spanish and English	100%	100%	90%
English Only	0%	0%	10%
N = 27	7	10	10

There is little direct evidence that illuminates how and why the language shifting in the household is related to higher educational attainment. Table III-3 yields finer gradations of current individual language use patterns, suggesting that the vast majority of the "at-risk" youth have become English-dominant bilinguals. However, increasing use of English does not appear to be related to differential educational attainment.

TABLE III-3. CURRENT INDIVIDUAL LANGUAGE USE BY GROUP--
CELL/GROUP/TOTAL N AND CELL MEAN RESPONSE TO
"HOW OFTEN DO YOU SPEAK SPANISH AT HOME?"

CURRENT INDIVIDUAL LANGUAGE USE	DROPOUT	GRADUATE	GRADUATE+
Speaks Spanish usually, English also spoken	Most of the time N = 1	N = 0	Most of the time N = 3
Speaks English and Spanish equally	Most of the time N = 2	N = 0	N = 0
Speaks English usually, Spanish also spoken	Half the time N = 4	Half the time N = 10	Half the time N = 6
Speaks English Only	N = 0	N = 0	Sometimes N = 1
N = 27	7	10	10

There is some evidence that college-bound youth received more special assistance in Spanish than their counterparts through activities at home and some at school. All "at-risk" youth were asked to detail who, if anyone, read to them before they entered school; youth were then probed to ascertain the frequency of reading activity and the language in which the reading occurred. Likewise, youth were asked questions about instructional activities, such as the teaching of the alphabet, counting, and so on, before school entry, as well as the assistance they received outside school with homework and with school work during elementary, junior and senior high school. While there was enormous variation within educational groupings, the eventual "college-bound" youth, on the average, reported that family members read to them every other day in Spanish before they entered school, whereas, on the average, eventual dropouts and graduates reported only weekly readings in Spanish.

Family members of the eventual college-bounds, on the average, also tried to teach the youth--again, in Spanish--approximately every other day, in contrast to twice a week for dropouts and once a month for graduates. This suggests that, family members promoted learning in the primary language through pre-school entry reading and teaching activities disproportionately for the eventual college-bound youth.

During the years of schooling, family members did not assist "at-risk" youth much during junior and senior high school. However, during the elementary school years, when English was the only formal medium of instruction in the school district, family members of college-bounds are reported to have assisted youth with school work approximately twice a week, on the average, in Spanish. Graduates, on the average, reported family assistance once a week in Spanish. Dropouts, on the average, reported family assistance once a month in Spanish. This suggests that the families of college-bounds supplementally encouraged learning in Spanish during elementary school years, although it is not known whether the encouragement and activity was purposive or simply to help the child in any language that family members could speak.

As noted above, all of the "at-risk" youth attended elementary school before bilingual education was implemented in the school district. However, the elementary records of three college-bounds and one dropout indicate that instruction in Spanish complemented regular instruction in English. In particular, records noted that the eventual college-bounds were "doing well" with their Spanish instruction. Since the recordkeeping was uneven, it is difficult to conclude much about informal trends in school-related encouragement of bilingual learning for these youth in elementary school years. However, it is clear that the school district has shown support for bilingual education over the years, developing a fully articulated K-12 bilingual program in the district since the mid-70s.

Additionally, in virtually every youth's school record file was a notice to the family asking for parental approval or disapproval to enroll the student in the district's secondary-level bilingual education program, and virtually all the parents consented. Since programming opportunities were relatively limited when the "at-risk" cohort attended junior high school, only four of the youth (roughly 15%) experienced formal bilingual education in the seventh and eighth grades. These four youth were <u>not</u> limited-English proficient. According to their relative language proficiency scores on Dos Amigos Spanish and Dos Amigos English tests, they all were classified as bilingual and, as such, the program reinforced their bilingualism. Furthermore, college-bounds were not tracked away from the bilingual program; two of the four youth experiencing a formal bilingual education program were eventual college-bounds.

Thus far, the discussion suggests that eventual college-bounds received more instruction bilingually than graduates and dropouts, beginning in the home through junior high school. Additionally, the trend continues through high school. Beginning in the last year of junior high school, Spanish instruction was offered as a foreign language. Nine of the 27 "at-risk" youth took the 4-quarter introductory course in Spanish: Seven were eventual college-bounds,

one was an eventual graduate, and one was an eventual dropout. In high school, enrollment in Spanish language courses was dominated by college-bounds, with the majority taking two years of Spanish language coursework and two reaching their fourth and fifth years of Spanish. While it cannot be determined whether the students and their families decided to supplement their education by taking elective Spanish language courses, or whether school personnel advised or tracked certain students into Spanish language courses (primarily to meet college entrance requirements), or some combination of both, the college-bound youth did receive more instruction in Spanish than their counterparts, and they report far more proficiency in Spanish than their counterparts (see Figure III-1 compared with Figure III-2). In fact, they report, on the average, biliteracy in Spanish and English.

Whether fluency and literacy in both English and Spanish, complemented by school and family instruction, reading, and assistance in both languages actually contribute toward pushing "at-risk" children toward college-bound educational attainment obviously is left unanswered in this study. A modest trend of bilingual instruction and readiness activities from before school entry through high school simply has been shown to be associated with the eventual educational attainment groupings for "at-risk" youth. This discussion does not support the contention that "at-risk" youth must give up use of Spanish to succeed in school. Like Gandara (1979), whose analysis concentrated on higher-achieving Mexican-American adults from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, this case study, in fact, suggests that "at-risk" children and youth who succeed tend to continue use of Spanish while achieving in English-speaking settings.

Notion 2: About Reading Achievement

> Reading achievement test scores will determine who drops out, who graduates, and who goes on to college among "at-risk" youth.

A number of researchers (see, e.g., Lloyd, 1978; Bachman, 1971) have found that differences on reading achievement are strong predictors of dropping out. Potential dropouts appear more likely than

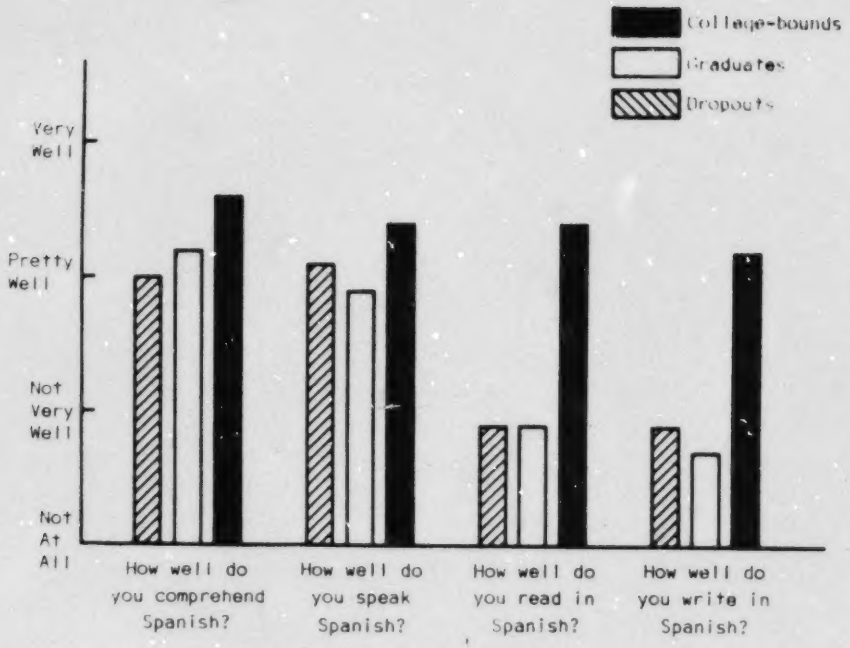

Figure III-1. Average responses by groups to questions of language proficiency in Spanish.

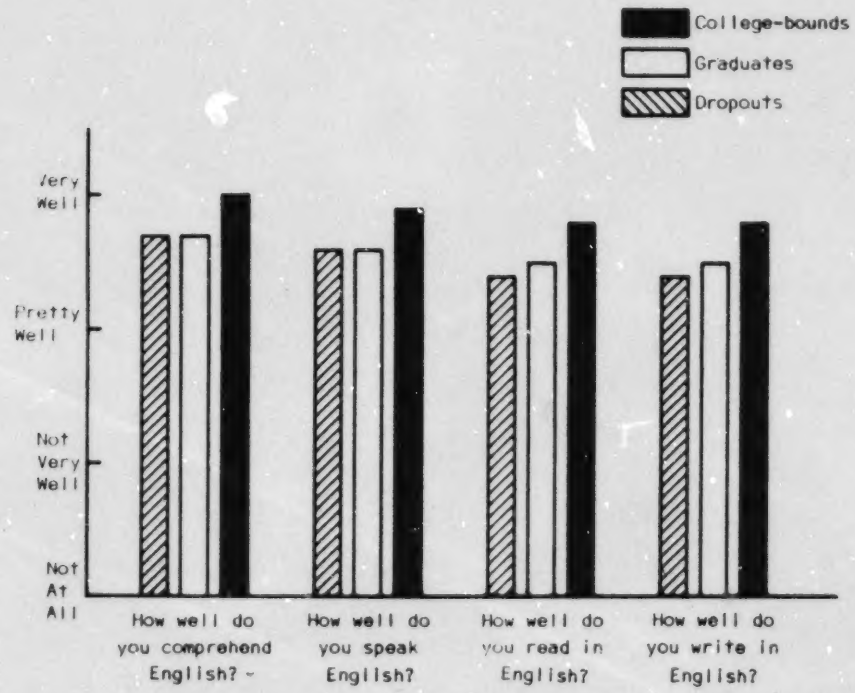

Figure III-2. Average responses by groups to questions of language proficiency in English.

potential graduates and college-bound students to experience difficulties with one of the basics of education--reading. Some postulate that as certain students have greater and greater difficulties with reading, they become more likely candidates for dropping out. In this section, we examine whether this notion seems applicable to "at-risk" youth.

Table III-4 shows the classification of dropouts, graduates and college-bounds according to third-grade, fifth-grade, seventh-grade, and ninth-grade reading achievement scores through the use of discriminant analysis. Some student records did not include test score data for the third through seventh grade levels for two reasons: (1) The student had not yet entered the target school district, or (2) the student missed the test date through excused absence. In the ninth grade, three dropouts failed to take the test because they were not enrolled in school at the time.

There is a tendency for college-bounds to be increasingly distinguishable from graduates and dropouts as these students progress through school, at least as revealed in test score data. However, even by the ninth grade, college-bounds are not found entirely in the higher reading achievement group. In fact, the scores of four out of ten college-bounds are indistinguishable from others in the middle grouping.

The patterns for dropouts and graduates present a complex picture. Most noticeably, discriminant analyses distinguish three groups of students in the third and ninth grades. However, in the fifth and seventh grades, the scores of dropouts and graduates are so generally intermingled that discriminant analyses can distinguish only between the general tendency of the higher reading test scores and the lower reading test scores.

Another interesting point is found in the seventh grade. In most studies on dropouts, junior high school reading achievement scores fairly well distinguish dropouts from others (see Steinberg, Blinde &

Chan, 1982). However, in this case study, 50 percent of the dropouts are higher achievers on the basis of performance in reading achievement--a greater proportion of higher achievers than that found among the eventual graduating group. About 35 percent of the college-bounds are indistinguishable from others scoring on the lower side in reading achievement.

In an attempt to investigate the peculiarities found in Table III-4, average national percentile scores of dropouts, graduates and college-bounds were examined. In Table III-5, some apparent trends can be seen against national percentile norms, only dropouts, on the average, score with about the same levels of performance. The average percentile score of graduates dips sharply at the fifth grade, then dips again at the seventh grade. At the ninth grade, their percentile score rises back to the range of third-grade reading achievement performance. For college-bounds, the average percentile score dips some at the fifth grade, then dips sharply at the seventh grade. Like the graduates, however, at the ninth grade, the average percentile score of college-bounds rises back to the range of the third-grade reading achievement performance.

Taking Tables III-4 and III-5 together, several explanations for the peculiarities are possible. First, given the small sample size in this study, the observed group means are unstable and "true" means may not reflect the observed trends. Second, it is possible that the noticeably missing scores in the third grade would have been such that third-grade norms for graduates and college-bounds, on the average, might have been much lower. Were this the case, trends would tend to show a lower reading achievement for graduates and college-bounds in the third grade and the general absence of significant dips and rising against national norms.

TABLE III-4. GROUPS BY READING ACHIEVEMENT

Third Grade Reading Achievement

	Reading Achievement Group		
Group	Lower	Middle	Upper
Dropout	4	0	1
Graduate	1	2	4
College-bound	0	4	4

Overall correct classification for hypothesis: 50%

Fifth Grade Reading Achievement

	Predicted Group	
Group	Lower	Upper
Dropout	4	2
Graduate	8	2
College-bound	3	6

Overall correct classification for hypothesis: 24%
Overall incorrect classification for hypothesis: 28%
Overall indistinguishable classification for hypothesis: 48%

Seventh Grade Reading Achievement

	Reading Achievement Group	
Group	Lower	Upper
Dropout	3	3
Graduate	5	3
College-bound	4	5

Overall correct classification for hypothesis: 22%
Overall incorrect classification for hypothesis: 44%
Overall indistinguishable classification for hypothesis: 34%

Ninth Grade Reading Achievement

	Achievement Group		
Group	Lower	Middle	Upper
Dropout	3	0	1
Graduate	0	8	2
College-bound	0	4	6

Overall correct classification for hypothesis: 70%

TABLE III-5. AVERAGE PERCENTILE SCORES BY GROUP

READING ACHIEVEMENT TEST	DROPOUT	GRADUATE	GRADUATE+
Third Grade (Stanine Conversion)	16-26	34-44	40-50
Fifth Grade	24.5	20.5	38.0
Seventh Grade	17.5	18.3	26.9
Ninth Grade	17.0	32.7	41.8

Finally, it is possible that a floor effect may be operating with the dropout scores, which tend to be low, and that the dips, at least among graduates and college-bounds, are real. A number of researchers have noticed that the test performance low-income students against national norms drops from the time of first testing through elementary and early junior high school. Heyns (1981), in her study of late elementary/early junior high school students, has shown that during summers, low-income students experience test performance loss while the test scores of their more advantaged counterparts tend to remain the same or rise. As such, it may not be surprising to find that the scores of low-income, language minority students tend to drop against national norms during elementary and junior high school, owing to a similar phenomenon.

No literature is known to explain, however, the apparent rise in the scores of graduates and college-bounds in the ninth grade. Data available in the case study, furthermore, shed little light. On other tests (writing achievement, language arts achievement, and mathematics achievement) administered in the eighth grade, graduate performance begins to rise and college-bound performance rises sharply against national norms. Table III-6 presents these results.

TABLE III-6. 8TH GRADE TESTING AVERAGE PERCENTILE SCORES BY GROUP

TEST	DROPOUTS	GRADUATE	GRADUATE+
Writing Achievement	9.9	26.6	40.1
Language Arts Achievement	15.0	22.5	35.2
Mathematics Achievement	12.5	33.1	54.4

This suggests that for college-bounds and graduates something related to increased test score performance may have occurred between the seventh and eighth grades. However, what that might be is by no means evident from the data. Only programmatic factors seem potentially related to the test-score upswing between the seventh and eighth grades. In the seventh grade, 6 of 9 eventual college-bound students were enrolled in Title I or combined bilingual-disadvantaged programs (the other three were in regular classes). Because they did well in these programs, by the eighth grade only one student remained in a combined bilingual-disadvantaged program. It is possible that the special instructional assistance that two-thirds of the eventual college-bounds received in the seventh grade contributed to the group's overall higher test performance on the September/October administrations in the eighth grade. Likewise, 7 of 10 eventual graduates were enrolled in Title I in the seventh grades; five remained in the Title I program in the eighth grade. The shifting of two graduates to regular classes, under the assumption of the contributory assistance of programming in the seventh grade, may have been sufficient to raise the group's test score performance against national norms on the September/October, eighth grade tests.

The final issue examined was the apparent difference among dropouts, graduates and college-bounds on the third-grade reading

achievement test. In particular, since college-bounds tended to become more and more distinguishable from dropouts and graduates, beginning with the third grade test scores, it seems worthwhile to investigate the factors which may have set this tendency in motion or contributed to the college-bounds' tendency toward early higher reading achievement. Several variables were identified which could be postulated to relate to test score differentials in the third grade: Language characteristics before entry into school; family type at entry; mother's educational attainment; father's educational attainment; number of older siblings; frequency of reading to child before entry into school; frequency of teaching child before entry into school; special assistance from school personnel in grades 1 through 3; frequency of helping with homework by family members during grades 1 through 3; and categorical programs.

Language characteristics before entry into school, and categorical programs did not appear to be related to test score differentials. Only 2 of the 27 "at-risk" youth with third grade test scores were not from intact nuclear families. None of the dropouts mentioned that they had received any special tutoring or help from teachers, aides or others in the school during the first three years of schooling. However, only one college-bound and one graduate mentioned receiving assistance. Thus, help from school personnel did not appear to explain test score differentials.

The educational attainment of fathers did not differ markedly among dropouts, graduates and college bounds: With rounded averages, fathers generally reached the eighth grade. The educational attainment of mothers did differ between college-bounds and dropouts/graduates. On the average, the mothers of college-bound students reached the tenth grade, in contrast with a seventh grade educational attainment level of mothers of dropouts/graduates; the educational attainment of mothrs was somewhat more related to third-grade test scores than that of fathers ($r = .42$, $p < .02$). The number of older siblings also was negatively related to reading achievement in the third-grade ($r = -.33$, $p < .05$); dropouts tended to have more older siblings, and mother's educational

attainment was negatively related to number of older siblings ($r = -.30$, $p < .10$).

In sum, youth from households in which the mother had a higher educational attainment level and in which there were fewer older siblings tended to perform better on third-grade reading achievement tests. College-bound youth tended to come from such households.

Frequency of family assistance with elementary schoolwork and of family teaching were relatively unrelated to third grade reading achievement scores. More related to third grade reading achievement was the frequency with which mothers read to the child before school entry ($r = .28$, $p < .10$). Perhaps, not surprisingly, this frequency is strongly related to mother's educational attainment level ($r = .60$, $p < .001$). Since mother's educational attainment level is differential among dropouts, graduates and college-bounds, it also is not surprising to find similar differentials with respect to these frequencies. On the average, dropouts reported that their mothers read to them about twice a week, as did graduates. College-bounds, however, reported a frequency of at least every other day.

The above discussion suggests that mothers of college-bounds may help them to the point that the college-bound students performed better on third-grade achievement tests than did graduates and dropouts, or, at least, that college-bounds tended to recall a greater frequency of assistance. This should not be construed to mean that mothers alone can help their children. Other family members, like fathers, older siblings, grandparents and other relatives, contributed to the overall frequency of assistance, but in virtually every case, mothers provided the regular, one-to-one assistance.

In sum, to the extent that these findings are suggestive, there appear to be two implications. First, through extant district programs for parents, districts may wish to explore training parents to assist children. It should be noted here that parental frequency scores included assistance in both Spanish language and English language, and

experimentation may include consideration of this. Second, insofar as youth did not remember receiving assistance from school personnel of the kind provided by mothers, in particular, it may be useful for districts to experiment with enhancing opportunities for teachers, aides, other personnel and adult volunteers to provide special, regular tutoring and assistance to "at-risk" children.

Notion 3: About Employment

> In economically-robust areas, "at-risk" youth will be drawn into the full-time job market and drop out of school.

This hypothesis, suggested or supported in the literature (Rumberger, 1981; Camp, 1980; Carnegie Council, 1979; Hunt & Wood, 1979; Steinberg et al., 1977; U.S. Employment and Training Administration, 1980), proffers that when economic times are good, "at-risk" youth will find the "real" world more attractive than school and will be pulled out of school into the full-time labor market. A similar but slightly differing notion is that "at-risk" youth leave school to work to help support their families (Cervantes & Bernal, 1977). Finally, while not often stated, some suggest that the parents of "at-risk" youth encourage them to help support the family, thus abetting their dropping out of school.

To examine these notions, it is first instructive to investigate the concept of "economically-robust areas." In research studies, this concept usually is operationalized to mean that the unemployment rate of the area is low or lower than the national average. Certainly, in the case of the target city, the unemployment rate (5.8% from available data) was low enough to suggest almost a full-employment status. Economic growth has been evidenced in skilled areas like electronics. However, all areas of the economy were not enjoying the same prosperity. In the last two to three years, employment in construction, has fallen by 22 percent. The local copper mining industry also has been hit hard. Internationally, copper prices have been depressed since late 1974, and, according to local newspapers, nearly 4,000 miners in the target city area have been laid off in the

last year. Study data suggest that the fathers of "at-risk" youth tend to be employed or, perhaps, now unemployed in areas of economic decline.

This discussion of "economic-robustness," then, has implications regarding the hypotheses. "At-risk" youth will be drawn into the alluring and growing economic industries only if they have the requisite skills valued in technological fields and contacts or job knowledge helpful in securing employment in those areas. While "at-risk" youth in former days may have been drawn out of school to work in mining and construction through knowledge of openings gained from fathers and others, it seems unlikely now, given cutbacks in those areas.

Turning to one hypothesis, several youth indicated that they left school to earn money, suggesting partial support for the notion that dropouts are pulled out of school to work. However, none suggested that the extra income was for family support. Instead, they reported that they wanted to make money for themselves. Additionally, all reported that the decision to drop out was entirely their own, and their desire to drop out outweighed the disapproval of their parents and older brothers and sisters. In short, from responses to questions on the reasons for dropping out and the influence of others on the decision to drop out, the limited case study data do not support the notions of need and family pressure for youth to withdraw from school.

The data further suggest that "at-risk" youth were not drawn out of school into waiting full-time jobs. Only one of the dropouts was employed at the time of the interview, and less than half of the dropouts were even looking for work. In fact, less than half of the dropouts reported ever having worked, and none reported having ever received any special job training. Apparently, when dropouts left school for reasons of employment, they had somewhat naive views about the labor market, given their lack of work experience and training.

It should be added here that probes were made to see whether inability to find full-time work was related to limited-English speaking ability; none of the dropouts felt that this was a problem. Rather, they were discouraged about their employment possibilities now and intended to take the advice of their parents and older siblings to return to school for their high school diploma and to secure additional specialized job training in areas in which work is available.

From the above scenario, one might wonder whether graduates and college-bounds also lack work experience. Especially for graduates whose plans were not clear from available school records, lack of work experience may limit their postsecondary opportunities. Interestingly, 90 percent of the graduates and 70 percent of the college-bound students reported working, some beginning at the age of fifteen. Most worked after school, on weekends, or full-time during the summer. Indeed, 30 percent of the graduates and 40 percent of the college-bounds were currently employed at the time of the interview. This finding tends to support an alternative notion that "at-risk" youth employment during the schooling years is positively associated with staying in school.

In summary, there is little evidence in this case study to suggest that the robust economy of the target city drew "at-risk" youth into full-time jobs and out of school. Furthermore, the notion that dropouts had to leave school to help support the family, either through direct family pressures or through an individual sense of responsibility, receives no support from this case study. Finally, however, there is some support for the notion that for "at-risk" youth, employment during the schooling years is positively associated with staying in school.

Notion 4: About Policies and Programs

In Chapter II, it was noted that in their state of residence, "at-risk" youth at the target school are faced with two policies which may adversely affect their chances of completing school: (1) Beginning

in the ninth grade, students must buy school books, and (2) after ten days of consecutive unexcused absences, students are dropped from current enrollment rolls. The requirement to buy books beginning in high school does present a hardship for the low-income family--of this, there is no doubt. However, through the extraordinary efforts of the target school's local community and businesses, there is an annual scholarship fund-raiser which generates sufficient funds to assist the needy students in the school. As such, the state policy has had little noticeable impact. Without these community efforts, it is not known what the impact of state policy would be, but one would speculate that increasing numbers of students would drop out.

The ten-day drop policy, effectively a fiscal policy, can be likened to state-imposed automatic quarterly suspension for ten days of truancy. Unexcused absences apparently refer to students who are absent for ten consecutive days without notification to the school--a phenomenon not unlike truancy, although the students in high school all have met the minimum compulsory attendance requirement. Within the process of dropping out, these automatic quarterly suspensions may abet dropping out, but they probably do not "cause" dropping out in this school district. That is, the implementation of policy in the target school does not appear to be biased against the "at-risk" youth. Support staff at the school speak Spanish; thus, there is no deterrent for Spanish-speaking parents to notify the school regarding student absences due to illness or need at home. Furthermore, attendance policies apparently are disseminated bilingually so that parents and students are aware of their responsibility to notify the school. Also, students are apparently not penalized for ten-day absences related to religious or cultural observances. As such, the ten-day drop policy does not appear to be a major factor in causing students to drop out of school.

However, quarter-long suspensions do tend to precede the dropouts' final exit from school altogether. For over half of the study's dropouts, at least one ten-day drop preceded the final leave-taking. The apparent scenario for these students was that they "disilke

school," did not attend for ten consecutive school days, were dropped for the quarter, re-entered to try again, continued to dislike school, and dropped out--with some dropouts having one or more quarter-long suspensions and re-entries.

An obvious intervention to break this cycle is personal counseling. Indeed, not one dropout recalled counseling services with appreciation. However, the intervention is a difficult one to recommend in light of the district's budgetary cutbacks and the student-counselor ratio which is several hundred to one. More reasonable alternatives appear to lie, perhaps, in regular group counseling sessions, or in peer-community participation programs. The latter idea, partially implemented in the target school now and fully operational in a number of big city school districts, revolves around the concept of giving all, not just the better students, some responsibility and "ownership" of their school. Under the direction of as few as one staff member, students across the student body (but especially uninvolved students) are organized to develop peer counseling programs, peer tutoring programs, school-community activites, school beautification programs, ways in which current students may introduce new students into the school "family," or any number of activities that students and school staff support. As such, the peer-community participation programs attempt to engage students in the target high school before they become disinclined towards the school.

Experiments in putting more effort into intra-school counseling and participation programs also seem worth considering in light of the "at-risk" dropouts' lack of participation in the numerous dropout and dropout-related alternative programs in the school district which are not located in the target high school or in the general neighborhoods of the students. The school district offers open-school-environment programs for students who find the regular school environment too restrictive, special "dropout" programs for students on the verge of dropping out, and extended day programs for students who need or want to work during regular school hours. Only the one dropout who is now

employed full-time participated in a program--the extended day program. Dropouts had heard of only a few of the options, or so they reported, and there is little evidence that they would have atended them even with knowledge. Some of the eventual dropouts who did not feel a sense of belonging in the target home high school were somewhat disinclined to become "visitors" at yet another school. For others, access to information about alternatives appears to have been a problem. Finally, district documents suggest that the program openings are limited, and it would appear that fully serving all potential dropouts cannot be met through the alternatives.

Chapter Summary

In the foregoing discussion, we examined four relatively simple hypotheses about differential educational attainment among "at-risk" youth and suggested complex findings. Findings based on the limited case study data suggest several points: 1) Greater and regular exposure to learning in English and Spanish, starting from before school entry through a student's educational career, appears to be associated with greater educational attainment. 2) For eventual college-bounds and graduates, reading achievement test scores appear to decline from the third grade to the seventh grade as scaled against national norms. However, for these youth, bilingual and disadvantaged program offerings appear to be related to increases in their test scores at the eighth and ninth grades as compared with national norms. 3) Third-grade differential reading achievement among eventual college-bounds, graduates and dropouts appear to be related to regular and consistent adult reading, teaching and helping students before entry into school and during the early elementary years, assistance which importantly was provided both in Spanish and in English. 4) Contrary to a popular hypothesis, "at-risk" dropouts were not lured into the economically robust economy of the area and thereby out of school; apparently, they were not skilled nor experienced enough to profit from the relative economic prosperity of the area. 5) There is some support for the notion that for "at-risk" youth, part-time employment during schooling years is positively associated with staying

in school. 6) The state policy of requiring high school students to pay for books does not appear to have adverse impact upon "at-risk" youth, although this may be due to extraordinary efforts on the part of the local school community to cushion the negative impact. 7) The state fiscal policy of dropping students with ten days of consecutive unexcused absence from attendance rolls appears not to be a major cause of dropping out as implemented in the target high school, although it does appear to abet the process of dropping out. 8) Despite the availability of dropout and dropout-related program alternatives throughout the school district, the study's dropouts neither knew of nor participated in them to any great extent, suggesting perhaps the need to experiment with intra-school programs in counseling and participation.

IV. CRITICAL TIMES IN THE PROCESS OF DROPPING OUT

In this chapter, we examine the issue of critical times in the process of dropping out of school. Our examination attempts to ascertain what appears to be important during different periods of the "at-risk" student's educational career, and what may be done to promote more successful educational experiences among "at-risk" students at these different stages.

Elementary School Years

The stage for this approach was set in Chapter III. In particular, evidence suggested that "at-risk" youth who enter school with greater exposure to language development and reading readiness activities in Spanish and in English and who continue to receive regular and consistent personal instruction, especially in early elementary school, tended to attain higher third-grade reading achievement levels. The eventual college-bound students tended to have this greater exposure and higher third-grade reading achievement, thus, setting them in motion toward graduation and college attendance. From this speculative finding, ideas were offered on what might be done to promote higher reading achievement among "at-risk" youth, including parent training and one-to-one in-school assistance.

The literature also suggests that differences in elementary school grades and progress reports are predictive of educational attainment groupings (see, e.g., Lloyd, 1978). Table IV-1 lends some support to this notion. In the first through third grades, eventual dropouts tended to receive teacher ratings of academic, social and individual achievement which were average or below average, while college-bounds tended to receive ratings of average or above average. However, the pattern is hardly suggestive that the assessments of first through third year teachers were strongly predictive of educational attainment; in general, teachers saw most of the students as making average progress and probably would have predicted that most of the students simply would be high school graduates.

TABLE IV-1. ACADEMIC, SOCIAL AND INDIVIDUAL PROGRESS IN GRADES 1 THROUGH 3 BY GROUP

	Progress Group		
Actual Group	Lower	Middle	Upper
Dropouts	2	3	0
Graduates	1	6	2
College-bounds	0	5	3

Overall correct classification under the hypothesis: 50%
Overall mean progress: 2
on a scale of
1 = unsatisfactory,
2 = satisfactory, and
3 = very good

EFFORT AND COOPERATION IN GRADED 4 THROUGH 6 BY GROUP

	Effort and Cooperation Group		
	Lower	Middle	Upper
Dropouts	2	4	0
Graduates	1	5	4
College-bounds	0	2	7

Overall correct classification under hypothesis: 56%
Overall mean effort and cooperation: 2.34
on a scale of
1 = needs improvement
2 = satisfactory, and
3 = excellent

While there may be some relationship between regular and consistent personal instruction and students' progress reports, these ratings probably tap other dimensions as well. First, students' progress reports, as well as third grade reading scores, may reflect differences in aptitude among "at-risk" children upon entry into schools. Unfortunately, we cannot examine this possibility, since intelligence tests were not administered at school entry. Second, for

most of the study's "at-risk" children, entry into elementary school was the first time that they had encountered an entirely English-speaking environment where authority figures communicated, for the most part, solely in English. Therefore, one might expect the initial school-student and teacher-student interaction patterns to reveal difficulties for some students which may have factored into progress reporting in the earlier grades. Based on the recollections of "at-risk" youth, there is some evidence to suggest that certain "at-risk" youth experienced greater acclimation difficulties than others.

The eventual graduates entered school, as will be recalled from Chapter III, with greater use of English and Spanish than others. The eventual dropouts and college-bounds tended to be more monolingual Spanish, although the college-bounds entered school generally exposed to greater language development and reading readiness activities. From these preliminary characteristics, one might expect that dropouts would have a harder time in the school setting than the other two groups.

"At-risk" youth were asked by the field coordinator to recall memories about elementary school (as well as later years). All of the eventual college-bounds, and 8 of the 10 eventual graduates, related positive memories about early elementary school teachers, while only 4 of the 7 eventual dropouts mentioned early elementary teachers among their positive memories. On the other hand, 4 of the 7 eventual dropouts remembered some early elementary school teachers in a negative light, while only one of the ten college-bounds and none of ten graduates had bad memories of teachers in early elementary school. In general, all three groups of "at-risk" youth had about the same average number of positive memories about elementary school (3), recalling good times with classmates, activities, cliques and the like. In contrast, 50 percent of the eventual graduates and 80 percent of the college-bounds did not recall any "bad" memories about elementary school, while, on the average, every eventual dropout described two or three. Although this evidence does not appear to present an overwhelming pattern, it is somewhat strengthened by the observation

that "at-risk" eventual dropouts (as well as the others) never again express the same frequency of negative memories about teachers nor about general experiences--not even about high school days, when they actually dropped out.

Thus, it may be useful for the district to review its practices regarding entering students. One suspects that, with the current programs and alternatives, including numerous parent programs at the elementary school level, initial negative interactional patterns between "at-risk" school entries and the school and its personnel may no longer prevail. However, it still may be useful to review current practices and consider whether to build upon school-family-student programs.

Little else in the case study data about these schooling years presents distinctive patterns. The only other interesting data on "at-risk" students relate to their intelligence scores and stanines on verbal and nonverbal tests administered in the fifth grade. Table IV-2 reveals the not surprising fact that "at-risk" students scored better on nonverbal intelligence tests than on verbal ones. Since "at-risk" students are language minorities by definition, the difference is not unexpected. It is, perhaps, salient that the school district had the foresight to administer both the verbal and nonverbal versions of the test. One presumes that these tests were used in placing children into special classes, and that the practice of dual administration could catch the language development factor confounding test result interpretation for the language minority students. None of the "at-risk" youth were placed in EMR or other such classes.

Junior High School

In Chapter III, we discussed the potentially positive effects of bilingual and disadvantaged programs on the test score achievement of eventual graduates and college-bounds. Two other popular hypotheses about the junior high school are examined here. First, the notion that grades or progress reports will continue to differentiate increasingly

TABLE IV-2. FIFTH GRADE INTELLIGENCE TEST RAW SCORES, STANDARD DEVIATIONS AND STANINES BY GROUP

TYPE	DROPOUT	GRADUATE	COLLEGE-BOUNDS
Non-Verbal	m = 36.8 s.d. = 16.1 stanine = 5.2	m = 38.4 s.d. = 16 stanine = 5.2	m = 54.4 s.d. = 12.7 stanine = 7.6
Verbal	m = 39.7 s.d. = 20.4 stanine = 4.2	m = 35.9 s.d. = 18.1 stanine = 3.7	m = 48.3 s.d. = 19.4 stanine = 5.3

among college-bounds, graduates and dropouts. In comparision with elementary reports, the tendency toward greater differentiation seems apparent. In the intermediate years, only 2 of 6 eventual dropouts had below-average progress reports (see Table IV-1); in the seventh grade, 5 of 7 had low cumulative grade point averages (CGPAs); and in the eighth grade, 6 of 7 had below-average CGPAs (see Table IV-3). For the eventual college-bounds in the primary years, 3 of 8 had above-average progress reports; in the intermediate years, 7 of 9 had above-average progress reports; in the seventh grade, 8 of 9 had above-average CGPAs; and in the eighth grade, all but one eventual college-bound had above-average CGPAs. Only the eventual graduates appear not to become better distinguished over time. On the whole, however, it is not particularly surprising to find the observed patterns of differentiation.

It is more interesting that college-bounds, graduates and dropouts do not differentiate on their attendance patterns in the seventh grade, since researchers have generally found non-attendance to be a factor associated with dropping out, particularly at the start of junior high school when the environmental shift from elementary school to junior high school sometimes poses problems for adolescents. Table IV-4 clearly indicates generally good attendance for all students in the seventh grade, with the average attendance rate at 91.2 percent. The pattern in the eighth grade, however, shows distinctions between the dropouts and the college-bounds. Eight of the ten eventual college-bounds attended school more than 85 percent of the time,

TABLE IV-3. SEVENTH GRADE CUMULATIVE GRADE POINT AVERAGE BY GROUP

	Lower	Middle	Upper
Dropouts	5	2	0
Graduates	1	5	4
College-bounds	0	1	8

Correct classification under hypothesis: 69%
Overall mean CGPA: 2.65 (on the standard 0-4 point scale)

CUMULATIVE GRADE POINT AVERAGE FOR SEVENTH AND EIGHTH GRADES BY GROUP

	Lower	Middle	Upper
Dropouts	6	1	0
Graduates	1	6	3
College-bounds	0	1	9

Correct classification under hypothesis: 78%
Overall mean CGPA: 2.72 (on the standard 0-4 point scale)

whereas six of the seven dropouts had below-average attendance records. The average attendance rate for college-bounds in the eighth grade, in fact, was about 92 percent; where the average attendance rate for dropouts was 70 percent in the eighth grade.

As with reading achievement and other test scores, something apparently has happened between the seventh and eighth grades that encouraged eventual dropouts to miss more school days than their counterparts. Available data do not suggest extended illnesses for dropouts, although one eventual dropout apparently did become very ill to the point that a few of his seventh grade teachers remarked on referral papers that he was not the "same" person: Withdrawn, thin and ashen in pallor. The rest, however, apparently simply missed school. Interestingly, eventual dropouts do not express the kind of negative

TABLE IV-4. SEVENTH GRADE ATTENDANCE BY GROUP

	Below Average	Average	Above Average
Dropouts	2	1	4
Graduates	0	8	2
College-bounds	1	6	2

Overall correct classification under hypothesis: 52%
Overall mean percent of attendance in school: 91.2%

EIGHTH GRADE ATTENDANCE BY GROUP

	Below Average	Average	Above Average
Dropouts	6	1	0
Graduates	2	2	6
College-bounds	1	1	8

Overall correct classification under hypothesis: 60%
Overall mean percent of attendance in school: 85.2%

recollections about junior high school that they did about elementary school days.

The only apparent distinguishing characteristic is that both eventual graduates and dropouts had fewer positive memories about junior high than they did of elementary school, while college-bounds had a greater number of positive memories. Perhaps the suggested sense of anomie that dropouts seemed to feel about high school (see Chapter III) has its roots in the junior high school experience. The seventh grade experience may have, at first, simply affected all the "at-risk" youth in similar ways. However, as the students progressed the new surroundings and routine, including the changing of classes and teachers from period to period, the college-bound students, at least, experienced some success in grades and achievement: They were transferred out of programs for disadvantaged, under-achieving students, took more demanding courses in algebra and Spanish language in the eighth grade and had more positive memories in junior high school than

in elementary school. Perhaps some were even singled out for achievement (school record files did not contain special merit notations). In contrast, the eventual dropouts and graduates do not have as many positive recollections as in elementary school (well less than one in junior high school), with dropouts tending to do slightly below-average in classes, and graduates doing about average.

If some students do begin to be disinterested in junior high school, about the only thing that can be done is to try to give them opportunities to become engaged. There is little evidence in the data and documents that extracurricular activities were numerous or that those which existed had any greater participation rates. As such, counseling and participation programs geared to seventh and eighth grade students, especially those who do less well academically, may be worth some experimentation. The district also may consider creating more middle-schools for its "at-risk" youth: Middle-schools remove the structural changing of classes and teachers from the seventh and eighth grade years. Researchers of adolescence have sometimes suggested that the structural change at the junior high level is especially untimely, since adolescents tend to have enough problems with psychological and physical maturity without adding other stressors.

High School Years

By the end of the eighth grade, "at-risk" eventual dropouts were fairly well distinguished from their counterparts on the basis of cumulative grade point averages (six or seven had low CGPAs, with the dropout group averaging 1.91 slightly below a C average), attendance reports (6 of 7 had poorer attendance records, with the group averaging about 70 percent attendance in the eighth grade), and with signs of anomie. It should come with little surprise that in high school years, dropouts differ from those who graduate and go on to college.

In reviewing the high school academic reports for the first quarter of the ninth grade, eventual dropouts had a grade point average of .79, which translates to less than a D-average. The highest GPA of any dropout is about 1.5 accumulated over a three-year period; however,

no dropouts came close to completing even a few of the required quarterly courses in English (16), in mathematics (8), in science (8), in history and government (8), and so on, needed for high school graduation. Most simply began, for example, by failing first-year English courses, taking make-up courses, failing them and so on, until dropping out of school largely in the eleventh and early twelfth grades (6 of 7) for the last time. Certainly, there are a couple of exceptions to this general trend, but the grade reports and other data primarily suggest that eventual dropouts never seemed seriously engaged in high school.

What do we mean by this? Eventual dropouts left junior high school with a grade-point average below a C. However, by the first quarter of their first year in high school, their grades dropped to below a D. While in school, they took academic courses and repeat courses, as well as many home economics, industrial education, and physical education courses, but passed very few of them--failing even the electives. There were no previous indications that the dropouts, on the average, were complete failures academically in school and, thus, unable to do the work. Hence, when eventual dropouts showed up for high school, they apparently were simply present, but not participating in school work. This is supported by statements indicating that these students had poor study habits, even though their courses were not particularly difficult. Likewise, where eventual graduates and college-bounds participated in three and six high school extracurricular activities, respectively, eventual dropouts frequently mentioned none.

One would think that the eventual dropouts would be particularly negative in remembering high school years. However, as noted earlier in this chapter, they were less negative about high school than elementary school. However, the trend toward having fewer positive recollections from elementary to junior high to senior high schools continues for the eventual dropouts, while the frequencies of positive memories rise for both the graduates and the college-bounds in high school.

While "at-risk" eventual dropouts were expected to differ from their counterparts in high school, they were not expected to disengage from high school so sharply at the very beginning of high school. Available data do not suggest anything about what happens at entry into high school that may affect the eventual dropouts. Nor do the available data suggest that "at-risk" eventual dropouts carry anything with them from junior high school that would seem related to the obvious first-quarter disengagement.

We can draw at least two implications for this finding: First, research should be done on the juncture between junior high school and high school to ascertain whether this suggestive finding has more support. Included in such work should be a cohort of "at-risk" youth who entered the ninth grade with the dropouts, graduates and college-bounds, but who are not graduating with their cohort class. Second, since the target high school already has creative and committed efforts towards improving counseling and peer participation programs, it may wish to focus some experimental efforts on entry level activities. Also, with reference to findings in Chapter III, counseling may well focus to some extent on job opportunities in the "real" world, insofar as dropouts had naive views about employment possibilities.

The balance of this section turns to questions regarding eventual graduates and college-bounds.

By the end of the eighth grade, one could say that cumulative grade points fairly well predicted the eventual educational groupings of students: Six of the ten eventual graduates were "average" students, and 9 of the 10 eventual college-bounds were "above average" students. Eventual graduates, on average, had a 2.65 GPA, and eventual college-bounds had a 3.45 GPA. This trend continued into the first quarter of ninth grade. Eventual graduates, on the average, had a GPA of 2.63, and eventual college-bounds had a GPA of 3.28. By the twelfth

grade, eventual graduates had a GPA of 2.5 and eventual college-bounds had a GPA of 3.8.

From trends such as these, researchers (see, e.g., Rosenbaum, 1976; Lucas, 1971) often suggest that at the start of high school (probably even beginning in junior high school), college-bounds are tracked toward college, and stay-ins are tracked towards graduation, whether the school admits to tracking or not. Sometimes they add that one can fall from the college track, but one cannot rise into the college-bound track. Generally, it was expected that the tracking trend would be observed in this case study. However, it seems that the target high school personnel do not lockstep students as has been found in previous work (Rosenbaum, 1976).

Certain types of courses tend to distinguish tracking. First, in English, there typically are classes for the low track, the middle track and the upper track. Analogous to this set at the target high school were Title I English classes, regular English classes, and English classes for the gifted or those in advanced standing. In the ninth grade, 5 of the 20 in the combined graduating groups (three graduates and two college-bounds) were enrolled in Title I English; 13 were in regular English (seven graduates and six college-bounds); and two were in advanced English. The two who began in advanced English continued in that stream throughout high school and were college-bound youth. By the end of the ninth grade, there still were five students in the Title I courses. However, now four were eventual graduates and only one was an eventual college-bound. An additional eventual graduate was moved to Title I English when did poorly in regular classes; another student, in Title I English an eventual college bound, was moved up to regular English when performance indicated the ability to handle regular classes. One eventual college-bound from the regular English classes was moved to advanced English. In short, the pattern in the ninth grade indicated very little tracking in English, with shiftings down and up based on students' abilities to handle the coursework. This pattern continues in the tenth grade in English. By the end of the tenth grade, only three eventual graduates remained in

Title I, with the remainder in regular classes. Additionally, the number of students from the combined graduating groups (all college-bounds) now in advanced English classes reached five, up from three at the end of the ninth grade. By the end of the eleventh, all the college-bounds save one were in advanced English classes, including those who began in Title I classes at the start of high school.

In mathematics, under a strict tracking rule, only college-bound students are allowed to take algebra and geometry. However, fully 50 percent of eventual graduates completed high school algebra, and 30 percent completed high school geometry. Of course, in contrast, all of the college-bounds eventually completed algebra, 90 percent eventually completed geometry, 4 of 10 completed algebra/trigometry, and one completed calculus. However, this does not detract from the finding that other students also had access to these courses.

Generally, in reviewing student records at the high school level, the type of course that students took was related to their previous performance in the subject matter class. As such, students doing well in English were moved up to more demanding courses, and students, perhaps pushed too hard by courses, were moved down to classes in which they could learn more or receive additional assistance. In mathematics, students appeared to enroll in algebra whenever they wanted to, leaving the stream if the work proved too difficult, and returning (which many did) when they wanted to give it another try. In many of the nation's school districts, biology is a college-track science course; however, in this target high school, virtually every graduating student has taken and completed biology. Strong performance in biology seems to be related to enrollment in chemistry, whereas average or less than average performance in biology tends to lead students to lesser demanding science courses.

In sum, we were pleasantly surprised to find that a cemented tracking program was not important in distinguishing eventual college-bound students from eventual graduates.

Finally, college-bounds and graduates differed in their diversity and definitiveness about future orientation. College-bounds were all definitively headed in one direction: They all planned to go on to college in the fall, and all had been planning to attend college since before the tenth grade--some for as long as they could remember. College-bounds reported that parents, older siblings, and friends--as well as teachers, counselors and administrators--were supportive and influential in their decisions about college. Only 40 percent of the college-bounds were headed to four-year institutions in the fall, but the rest, who planned to attend a two-year institution in the fall, fully planned to transfer to a four-year institution to receive a baccalaureate. Between high school graduation and college, all were planning to work during the summer, with most already having summer jobs lined up.

The graduates, in contrast, were much more diverse and less definitive about their futures. Somewhat surprisingly, 7 of the 10 graduates stated that they intended to go to college. However, only 3 of the 7 actually planned to enter college in the fall, in particular, to attend a two-year institution with the intention of transferring. The other four stated that they intended to enter college "in a year or so," generally suggesting a lack of definitiveness of planning. None of these four intended to gain a baccalaureate degree; all meant that they planned to attend the local junior college to gain a vocational-technical associate certification or degree. The response pattern here paralleled that of dropouts, four of whom stated that they intended to enroll in college "in a year or so," meaning enrollment for an associate certification or degree.

The balance of graduates stated plans either to get married or to enter the military, with only one graduate showing the definitiveness of already having enlisted in the military. The rest were more like the remaining dropouts who planned to join the military or get married "in a year or so" or "sometime soon."

All of the graduates and college-bounds whose future plans suggested definitiveness and who were taking actions to actualize future plans also stated that parents, older siblings, friends, teachers, counselors, and administrators were influential in their decisionmaking. All of these people apparently offered them advice and information about opportunities and about "moving on" their decisions. As such, a strong network of "advisors" appears to be related to concrete decisionmaking and planning for the future for these "at-risk" youth.

In contrast, those whose plans were vague--the dropouts and six of the graduates--apparently received advice from various individuals, although not as many as the other "at-risk" youth, but it appears that these youth had not reached a point of actually making a decision to do something. Many of their responses about future plans seemed more to reflect wishful speculation than actual plans for the future.

Data were not collected to shed more light on the difference between planning and wishful speculation. It may be that the more academically successful "at-risk" youth received more directed and informative advice from the school and others than the dropouts and less academically successful youth. It may also be that the more wishful thinkers tended to have less clear notions about their reasonable options, about themselves and society, or about what they really would like to do. Whatever the case, the general finding seems to support the target high school's decisions to concentrate curricular reforms on linkages with the "real" world and to enhance counseling services to include more extensive career counseling.

Summary of Interventions

In this chapter, speculative findings about critical times in the process of dropping out have been discussed, and a few interventions have been offered for possible experimentation. Interventions may be classified by types, but the discussion did not suggest that the same issues are important nor the same approaches appropriate in each

critical time period. In brief, there are three general types of intervention presented in this chapter, within which this summary provides critical-time-specific suggestions.

Academic tutoring and programming. From before entry into school through high school, the more academically successful "at-risk" youth have had greater exposure to bilingual learning, at least in this study, with "at-risk" college-bound students reporting biliteracy in Spanish and in English. School districts may wish to examine this apparent phenomenon more comprehensively and to enhance bilingual learning opportunities for "at-risk" youth should the tentative finding be supported.

Particularly before entry into school and during the early years of elementary school, regular and consistent personalized academic assistance from adults seems important to early and continuing academic achievement; programs to help train parents, volunteers and regular school personnel to provide one-to-one regular assistance may be worth some experimentation at this point.

In junior high school, there was some evidence that programs for disadvantaged and bilingual youth contributed to the educational progress of some "at-risk" youth. Peer tutoring also may be beneficial. Allowing under-achieving "at-risk" youth to tutor late elementary students also may be worth some experimentation, insofar as research tends to show that both tutor and tutee benefit from directed cross-age tutoring.

In high school, evidence suggested that the target high school did not cement "at-risk" youth into college-bound and regular tracks. Instead, students appeared to be placed initially according to previous educational performance and to be moved to lesser demanding courses to more demanding courses as classroom performance suggested. The target high school also may wish to consider making their academic curriculum more reflective of a continuum of learning, by sharpening the description of learning skills acquired sequentially, at least in the

English courses, while allowing course completion to meet English course requirements. In this way, it would be clearer to students that they are not tracked, but instead are moving along a continuum of skill acquisition. It is less clear that mathematics and science courses are amenable to this approach.

Entry considerations. At both entry into elementary school and entry into high school, adjustment or acclimation seemed problematic for some "at-risk" students. At entry into elementary school, "at-risk" students with less exposure to predominantly English settings or with lesser exposure to language development and reading readiness activities seemed to have more negative experiences at entry than their counterparts--or, at least, to have had more negative memories of elementary school, which were more negative than any other period of schooling. Initially negatively encounters with schooling may be difficult to undo; as such, schools may wish to review how they orient and welcome children and families to their first days and years in school and to enhance current programs.

At entry into high school, many "at-risk" youth whose academic records were undistinguished, but not necessarily suggesting failure, disengaged themselves sharply from virtually the entire high school experience. Peer participation programs, which have often included responsibility for welcoming and orienting new students to the high school, may be one way to reduce this disengagement. Counseling and peer counseling efforts may prove useful in engaging students before they drift psychologically and physically away from the school.

Counseling, participation and structure. While counseling and peer participation programs are noted above with respect to entry at high school, the findings of the case study also suggest the need for these programs at the junior high school level. By the middle of junior high school, disinterest in school is noticed in the eventual dropout. Available documentation suggests that extracurricular activities are not engaging to these students, and counseling is rarely sought or given. Peer participation programs at the junior high school

level may help certain "at-risk" youth overcome the sense of "not belonging," brought on by their having to change classes and teachers, in which they may feel simply part of the faceless changing crowd. Additionally, school districts may wish, as part of their cost-reduction planning, to experiment more with middle-schools which remove the apparent structural concern by continuing the elementary school practice of having one teacher for most of the day.

Counseling and participation have already been discussed with respect to entry into high school. There also is some evidence that the kinds of career counseling endeavors being considered and implemented at the target high school are important, since a number of "at-risk" youth--dropouts and graduates alike--seemed unable to move from wishful speculation about the future to taking action toward real planning. Peer participation programs can have a generally positive effect on high schools. One such program in Los Angeles recently was commended by the Mayor for its effects on students' attendance, on reduction of vandalism, on school-community relations, on reducing in-school behavioral disturbances, on school beautification, and on student contributions in the form of city-wide presentations, art, and so on. Finally, as a structural and programmatic innovation, school districts and high schools may wish to investigate the possibility of encouraging economically-robust industries to participate in joint vocational training activities, coordinated with career counseling. Successful programs have been launched in several urban school districts, whereby industry representatives tutor and train students in technical and basic skills through adopt-a-school programs.

V. OUTLIER ANALYSIS

When the analysis for this study was originally planned, it was expected that the outlier analysis would be particularly instructive about what could potentially affect "at-risk" youth. In particular, special efforts were taken to identify four types of outlying youth:

- "At-risk" youth who began their educational careers looking very much like dropouts or mediocre students, but whose educational records indicated a major upturn at a certain point in school to the point that they became college-bound students;
- "At-risk" youth who began their educational careers as high achievers, but who took a turn for the worse to the point that they became dropouts;
- "At-risk" youth with extreme tendencies towards dropping out; and
- "At-risk" youth with extreme tendencies toward college-boundedness.

Factors affecting these types of youth were expected to provide some indication of the kinds of practices which should be changed and which should be enhanced. Now, however, it seems short-sighted not to have recognized that with a sample size of roughly 30, the existence of outlier groups was not likely. Still, a few stories are instructive to relate.

Case One: Juan

One of the outliers was an "at-risk" youth who slipped through our screenings at selection. He entered U.S. schools for the first time at the age of 9, and did not do well on standardized measures of achievement (in English). In fact, through the ninth grade, he was consistently placed in Title I instructional programs, supplemented by bilingual instruction or English-as-a-second language instruction. However, by the end of the tenth grade, he was placed into regular English instruction classes, and by the twelfth grade, he was taking Advanced Placement English. Since his mathematics test scores were at the 40th percentile on the eighth grade administration, this

youth, perhaps not surprisingly, enrolled in algebra in the ninth grade, followed by geometry in the tenth grade, algebra and trigometry in the eleventh, and college level courses in the twelfth. While experiencing some difficulty in the last two years of mathematics, he nonetheless persisted with an interest in math--in fact, persisting in mathematics further than any college-bound student. Likewise, he persisted in taking increasingly demanding science courses, being only one of two "at-risk" youth enrolled in physics in the twelfth grade. Juan (not his real name) clearly was an average student who became a college-bound.

This youth was distinguished from other college-bounds as one of the few who really ever received extensive special help and tutoring from teachers, aides, counselors, club sponsors, coaches, and even peer tutors in high school.

While the quantity of support the youth received from the home fell in the same range as that of most college-bounds, from his earliest recollections of family assistance, an intricate network of extended family relations contributed to his development. Within this network, the influence of his older siblings cannot be overlooked. They, being among the more English proficient members of his immigrant family, were able to help him with schoolwork in English in ways that others could not. All of his older siblings also completed at least two years of college, and 3 of 4 were still in college at the time of the interview. Thus, by word, and perhaps more importantly by example, his brothers and sisters encouraged him to "try to improve himself," "not to give up," and "to seek achievement."

Juan's story, then, tends to support trends noted in previous chapters. Strong networks of "advisors" seem important in achievement, and this youth had the support and assistance of both school people and family members. The flexible academic programming of "at-risk" youth in the target high school was beneficial to this youth, whose programming never made him feel singularly a low-achiever. His story is an uplifting one. We turn next to a less happy scenario.

Case Two: Maria

Maria, on every measure of academic achievement, progress, attendance, and school-recollection, was predicted to be a college-bound. Her attitudes towards school, family help, parent levels of educational attainment and so on suggested "college-boundedness." However, she was classified in our sample as a "simple" graduate, because there were no indications in her school records that she had definite plans to go to college, as indicated by college placement tests taken in the 11th and early 12th grades. Indeed, Maria reported that she had only received strong encouragement from teachers to go on to college during her senior year and was only now considering enrolling in a two-year college "in a year or so." Her immediate plans were to enter a school for legal secretaries.

Maria described herself as a "loner" and, while receiving generally excellent grades in elementary and junior high school, tended to recall being of average ability during elementary and junior high school years. She also indicated that she was in the general program, not in a college-bound program in high school, despite taking algebra and geometry, chemistry, and advanced placement history--all of which are demanding, college-directed courses.

Maria, to us, clearly presents a case of a young person to whom special outreach must be made. Counseling, in the best sense of the word, in junior and senior high school could have helped her to buffer her low self-opinions and helped open up to her more options for her future than her self-perceptions allowed her to see.

Case Three: Rosa

Rosa dropped out of school, largely as a result of the unfortunate circumstances in her life. While her performance on standardized tests is remarkably high, her grades were simply average in elementary school. Beginning in the eighth grade, her grades took a marked

downturn, and like other dropouts, her high school record is hardly a record at all.

What the grades and test scores don't reveal is that Rosa whose father died before she entered school, also lost her mother in the ninth grade, after an extended illness. To add trouble upon grief, she also became pregnant, had the baby, and is now living in a large extended family situation. It is not surprising that the exigencies of her life may make schooling an insignificant issue.

Her school records for high school, while generally dismal, did reveal one quarter in which she did remarkably well in course which were academically demanding. During her pregnancy, she was apparently enrolled in homebound instruction, as well as in instruction for teenage parents. After having the baby, she tried to return to school but could not handle both child-rearing and school. While one can understand that fiscal constraints force limited enrollment in the homebound program intended primarily for those hospitalized, and bed-bound, the extension of the program to include youth like Rosa could alter the course of so tragic a scenario.

Case Four: Luis

Luis' story presents the stereotypic tale of dropouts. He does well on standardized tests, but his grades, behavior, attendance records and attitudes towards school predict "dropout." From entry into school, this young man's story is one of continual clash with school regulations and authority figures. The only support that he apparently seeks and seems to find is with his peers, who he describes as his "gang." That he took achievement tests seriously enough to score well almost suggests that he was trying to show the authority figures that it was not he, but they, who were in the wrong--that, indeed, he was a bright person, despite their views.

His tale is the one often told by many about dropouts, and it is one from which it is difficult to suggest alternatives. Less rigid

school environments may have made a difference to this youth beginning in his elementary years, but little else seems reasonable to suggest. What is encouraging about Luis' story is that it is unique in our sample; no other dropout could be stereotyped as he, and, perhaps, tales of these types of dropouts are more fictitious than real.

Summary

While the outlier analysis did not meet the expectations of the original study design, it is important to include it in this case study, especially as we have here in the final chapter. In doing research on "at-risk" youth--dropouts, graduates, and college-bounds--it is easy to slip into a mode of thinking of the students only in terms of group trends. While the trends are important, the outlier analysis reminds us that individuals with varying characteristics and feelings and personal histories actually do exist. To end by breathing some life into findings, tables, and trends is not an inappropriate way to complete this study.

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